■ Sports / A22

'Bare Eye' learns identity of Filipino who stayed at P1-M night suite in Vegas

■ Across / A15

18 Sarangani employees fired for P46M in unliquidated funds

■ World / A9

15-year-old student kills 9, then self in Minnesota

■ World/ A8

Camilla will be queen once Charles is king

■ Motoring / B2-1

On the road to a vacation paradise? Look up the Good Samaritans

US Immigration harasses Loi in San Francisco airport

MGA TSISMO-SONG WALANG MODO!

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

WHAT is it about junketing Filipino senators and the United States Immigration service?

Senate President Franklin Drilon, whose Ferragamo

US IMMIGRATION/ A18

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website: www.inq7.net

US court sets $50,000 bail for ex-PNP colonel

By Margaux C. Ortiz

A HEFTY $50,000 (P2.7 million) bail has been set for the fugitive ex-police officer, Michael Ray Aquino, who was arrested in New York City recently for allegedly violating US immigration laws, according to a National Bureau of Investigation official.

US COURT/ A18

Bomb trainer of Abu falls

Indonesian admits MILF sheltered him

By Dona Pazzibugan

HE LOOKED young enough to pass for a teenager. And nothing in his lean frame suggested he was what the military portrayed him to be: a man who trained terror bombers.

A faint hint of a smile even crossed Rohmat's face when the Armed Forces yesterday presented the Indonesian—hands bound in cuffs—to the media, saying he helped plan with the Abu Sayyaf Group leaders the Valentine's Day bombings in Makati City.

Intelligence officials said Rohmat trained the Abu Sayyaf in bomb making, particularly the use of mobile phones to trigger explosions.

Like many Indonesians, Rohmat goes by one name only.

Linked to the al-Qaida network of Osama bin Laden, the JI has been blamed for a string of terrorist attacks in Southeast Asia, including the 2002 bombings at Indonesia's Bali resort, which killed nearly 200 people.

"He is a big fish," Armed Forces public information chief Lt. Col. Buenaventura Pascual said. "He was responsible for training the people involved in the Makati attack."

A military statement said Rohmat—also known by the alias "Zaki"—had admitted a mouthful to investigators:

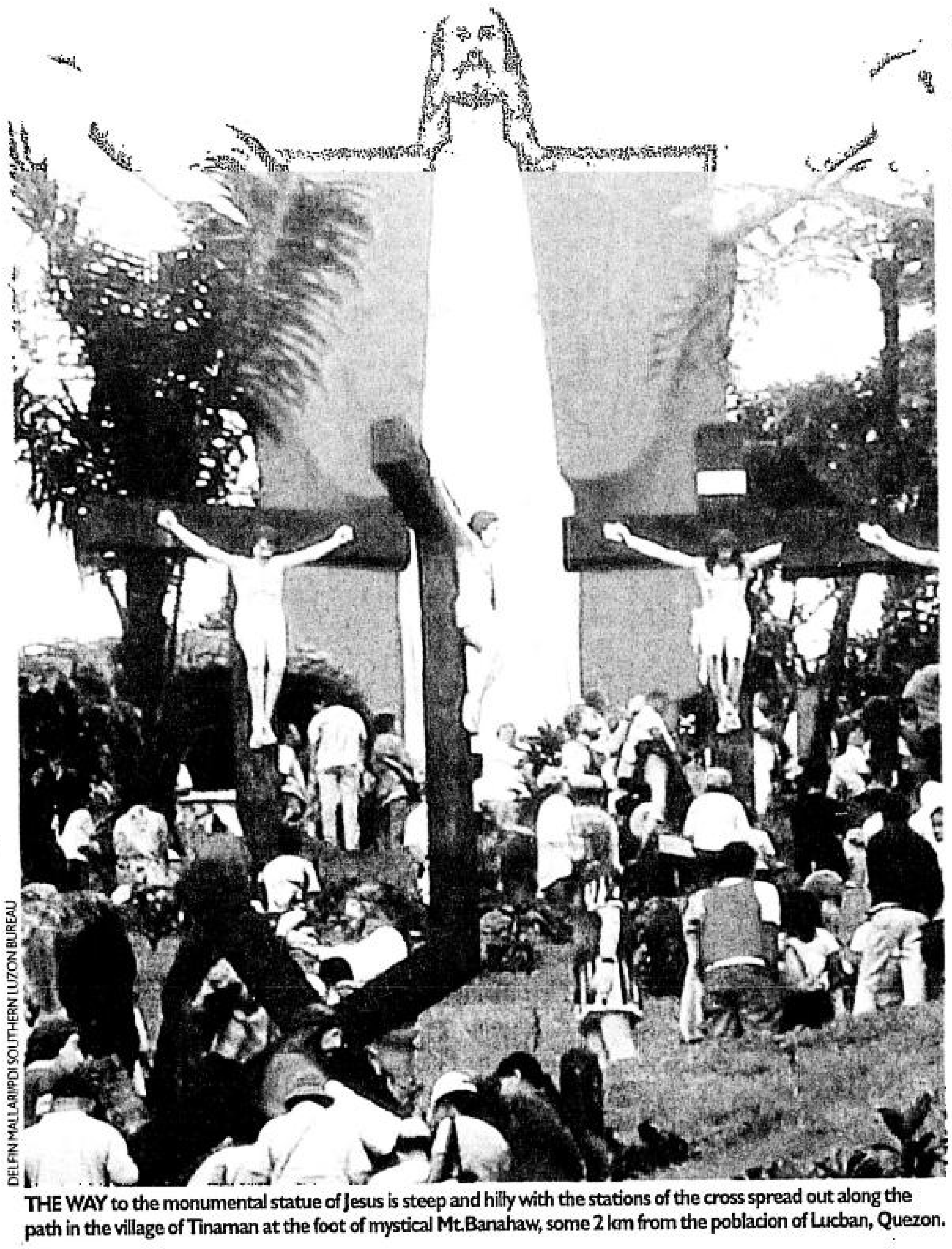
- He was present when the ASG leaders planned the Feb. 14 bombings in Makati, General Santos and Davao City, which killed eight people and wounded more than 150;
- ASG's senior leader Khadaffy Janjalani and Commander Abu Solaiman "ordered and financed" the bombings; and
- He was given sanctuary by members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to evade

BOMB/ A6

AFP
DETAINEE

JOAN BONDOC

BIG CATCH: Rohmat, alias Zaki, trained the Abu Sayyaf how to make bombs and use cell phones to trigger blasts, according to military.



DELFIN MALLARI/PDI SOUTHERN LUZON BUREAU

THE WAY to the monumental statue of Jesus is steep and hilly with the stations of the cross spread out along the path in the village of Tinaman at the foot of mystical Mt.Banahaw, some 2 km from the poblacion of Lucban, Quezon.

'Stairway to Heaven' drawing devotees to Mt. Banahaw village

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

LUCBAN, Quezon—For the Catholic faithful who want to have a spiritual experience this Holy Week, a hilly portion in the village of Tinamnan at the foot of mystical Mt. Banahaw, 2 km from this town's center, is the place to meditate.

The hill has been transformed into a virtual "stairway to heaven" with the monumental Stations of the Cross strategically spread along the pathway and the grotto of the Virgin Mary at the center of the steep.

And just like the famous grotto in Lourdes, France, cold water also springs from its bosom.

After the physically exhausting 292 steps on the concrete stairs on the left ascent, and 278 if one climbs from the right with only a rope to cling on, a 50-foot concrete icon of the resurrected Christ, with all the sanctifying glory of his outstretched hands, welcomes devotees at the summit.

For the legions of the sick and the afflicted, the "sacred place" is better known as the "Kamay ni Hesus Healing Center" with the charis-

STAIRWAY/ A4

DELFIN MALLARI/PDI SOUTHERN LUZON BUREAU

FR. FALLER at the "Kamay ni Hesus Healing Center" where legions of the sick come for his ministrations

TALE OF TWO PRIESTS

A priest called Muhammad

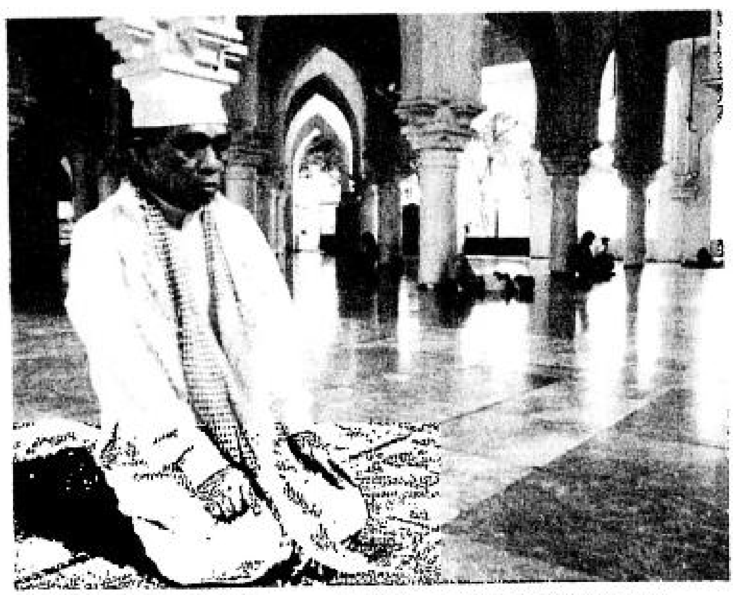
By DJ Yap

HE USED to be known as Father Stan among his flock in parishes around Metro Manila. These days, he goes by the name Muhammad, after the great prophet of the faith he now calls his own.

Three years ago, Estanislao Soria, a priest in the Archdiocese of Manila, made that great leap of faith from Christianity to Islam. He became Muhammad Soria, much to the consternation of his devout Catholic family.

"My family was so hurt they wouldn't talk to me. Only the wife of my cousin understands. My elder brother respects me

A PRIEST/ A4



REM ZAMORA

MUHAMMAD SORIA: Leap of faith from Christianity to Islam.

This cop is a man of the cloth

By Christian V. Esguerra

IN THE EYES of God, can a policeman really kill even the most hardened criminal?

Not a few policemen have been confronted by this dilemma. And many of them have found peace in the words of Rev. Fr. Rey Urmeneta, 51, head of the Philippine National Police Chaplain Service.

"It's morally justifiable," he would tell conscience-stricken policemen, usually the rookies.

Fr. Rey says this advice should calm even those bothered by last week's Bicutan prison siege that killed 22 Abu Sayyaf detainees. The policemen simply did their job, he says.

It just so happened that not all of the fatalities in the prison attack were like Alhamser Limbong, the Abu Sayyaf commander who had tortured the late Fr. Rhoel Gallardo by pulling out his nails. Unfortunately, they also included a 75-year-old detainee suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

"When you kill in the line of duty, that's the will of God,"

THIS/ A4

JOAN BONDOC

FR. REY: Cops just do their jobs.

Teddyboy told: No. 4 paper can't be taken over by No. 7

By Fe Zamora and Alcuin Papa

"CONFLICT OF INTEREST," the 100-strong labor union of the Manila Standard accused Makati City Rep. Teodoro "Teddyboy" Locsin Jr. in a complaint filed Monday at the Philippine Press Institute.

The labor union filed the complaint two weeks after Locsin became publisher of the Manila Standard Today, a broadsheet which combined Locsin's Today with the Manila Standard, which is majority-owned by businessman Enrique Razon.

Jing Villamente, vice president of the Manila Standard Employees Association (MSEA), said they were questioning the propriety of Locsin's dual role as publisher and legislator, noting that it was a violation of the Philippine Journalists Code of Ethics.

"We don't want a congressman masquerading as a journalist to run a well-respected newspaper. The No. 4 newspaper cannot be taken over by the No. 7 newspaper," said Villamente.

"How can he handle the newspaper, and remain independent, when he is a congressman?

Villamente also said that the PPI complaint was "only the beginning," and that they are preparing to bring the conflict-of-interest issue to the House ethics committee.

Manila Standard editor in chief Julie Yap Daza said she had not seen a copy of the complaint to the PPI. "But I understand the apprehensions and the fears that the union members are feeling," Yap-Daza told the INQUIRER.

She said that Locsin arrived at the Manila Standard office on the afternoon of March 6 when Mani-

TEDDYBOY/ A7

Second FRONT PAGE

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WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Southern Visayas and Mindanao will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms. The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers and thunderstorms.

SOURCE: PAGASA

COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/03/23/05

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Iloilo/Bacolod	Partly Cloudy
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Roxas	Partly Cloudy
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Cebu	Partly Cloudy
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Partly Cloudy	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

Bank expects VAT compromise deal

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

THE SENATE is expected to pass on to President Macapagal-Arroyo the responsibility, along with the anticipated political backlash, of raising the value-added tax (VAT) rate, according to the American investment bank Credit Suisse First Boston (CSFB).

This was one of the compromise deals that could be struck between the executive and legislative branches to ensure the passage of the VAT reforms—increasing the rate from 10 percent to 12 percent and removing exemptions—within the second quarter, CSFB said in its March 21 report on the Philippines.

"We doubt that the VAT bills will be passed in the extended congressional session from March 30 to April 1," it said. It expected the negotiations to last in one or two months.

In contrast, Malacañang expects the reforms to be passed in the special session to be held immediately after Holy Week. Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye yesterday said: "We are confident that our lawmakers will rise to the occasion, reconcile their versions of the VAT bill, and pass it in the special session."

The House of Representatives has already approved the VAT rate increase and lifting of exemptions, while the Senate has indicated it was leaning toward approving only the removal of exemptions while maintaining the current tax rate.

In searching for a middle ground to break the VAT deadlock in the Senate, CSFB said: "The Senate may agree to increasing the VAT rate, but we don't rule out the possibility that the Senate may include a provision in its proposals which would allow the President to raise the VAT rate to 12 percent from 10 percent."

CSFB said this move was legal. "In times of fiscal distress and high debt service costs, our conversations on the ground indicate that the Philippine Constitution does allow the President to design tax policy. In this way, the Senate passes on the buck of a possible populist backlash to the President. Meanwhile, the President can claim victory highlighting that she is able to implement tough tax measures."

Another compromise, CSFB said, was in the area of the "no pass-on provision" of costs incurred due to the imposition of the VAT on independent power producers (IPPs) that was endorsed by the House but frowned upon by the Senate.

"We believe the House may agree to the Senate's proposal to raise the VAT on IPPs to 12 percent from 0 percent in one step rather than the graduated scheme and remove the no-pass on provision granted to IPPs as part of its current proposals," CSFB said.

It also expected the Senate and House to reach a common ground on the proposed tiered VAT on food and petroleum products.

"Processed foods such as cooking oil, milk, and refined sugar may have the average VAT rate reduced to 6 percent from 8.5 percent rather than the Senate's proposal of imposing a VAT on both raw and processed food. These measures are likely to be revenue neutral," CSFB said.

CSFB said the projected "compromise deal" between the House and Senate on the VAT bills could generate as much as P100 billion in new revenues or substantially higher than initial estimates of P65 billion.

With the likelihood of the VAT reforms' approval in the second quarter, it said "there will be no further downgrades in the Philippines' foreign currency sovereign rating in the next six months."

Absence of 4 reliever guards on eve of Abu jailbreak try probed

By Luige A. del Puerto and Norman Bordadora

DID THEY know what was coming? Investigators want to know.

The question cropped up after a top investigator disclosed yesterday that four jail guards failed to report for work on the eve of the jail break attempt in Camp Bagong Diwa in Bicutan last week.

They were supposed to replace the guards who were killed or wounded when Abu Sayyaf detainees took control of the jail on the morning of March 14.

"(But) the entire shift was absent," said Sr. Supt. Federico Laciste, chief of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-National Capital Region.

Laciste said he had given this report to Interior Undersecretary Marios Corpus. He did not disclose the names of the guards, saying only the department could do so.

"*Nakakapagtaka*. Did they know what was coming? I would understand if one or two went absent, but all four?" he said.

Laciste said the four guards were supposed to be on duty at the special intensive care area (Sica), where the Abu Sayyaf men were detained, between 11 p.m. on Sunday and 7 a.m. on Monday.

"They were absent, all of them. That's why we will ask them to explain why," Laciste said.

Something wrong?

Corpus, who heads the interior department's fact-finding team investigating the incident, said something was amiss with the failure of the prison guards to report for duty.

"They will be investigated. It is highly unusual for an entire shift not to show up," Corpus added.

The names of the reliever guards were also not disclosed, and Corpus stressed that charges won't be forthcoming until his team finishes and comes up with a formal report on the incident.

His team is supposed to submit its report 30 days after the prison siege.

Earlier, investigators learned that three guards were "half-asleep, half-awake" when the jailbreak attempt took place around 6:30 a.m. on March 14.

The guards, Jail Officers 2 Rogelio de la Cruz and Almadeo Salapate, who both died, and JO2 Albert Lubrio, who was critically wounded, apparently never had a chance to fight back. The Abu Sayyaf men easily disarmed and shot them using their own firearms.

Laciste said they should already have been replaced by 11 p.m. Sunday (March 13). "They had extended their shift."

Collusion angle

Investigators were focusing on the possible collusion between jail guards and the Abu Sayyaf men.

"This angle (is) raised due primarily to the discrepancy in the number of firearms that had been recovered in the aftermath of the siege, and the number of firearms taken from the slain and wounded BJMP personnel," Laciste said in his initial report.

The Abu Sayyaf men got four short firearms from the jail guards, but seven short firearms were recovered after the assault, according to the police.

Members of the Special Action Force killed 22 Abu Sayyaf men on Tuesday, 27 hours after the attempted jailbreak. One SAF officer also died in the initial volley of gunfire.

Lapses

Over the weekend, Metro Manila's top police official also criticized what he said were "obvious lapses" on the part of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology.

NCRPO chief Deputy Director Avelino Razon said the Camp Bagong Diwa jail had plenty of places where inmates could hide a gun, and Abu Sayyaf inmates could meet as often as they wished.

It was only a matter of time before they try to escape, Razon said on Saturday.

"It was a time bomb waiting to go off—and it happened—on March 14," he said.

Razon said the Camp Bagong Diwa is definitely not a "maximum-security prison." If it were, it is only in name, he added.

"It's more like a dormitory or an apartment," quipped Razon.

Recall special session bid, Joker urges GMA

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

SENATORS held special briefings on the value-added tax reform way into the Holy Week and will continue next week in a bid to neutralize opposition to Malacañang's big-ticket tax measure.

But Sen. Joker Arroyo yesterday urged President Macapagal-Arroyo to make a Lenten sacrifice by recalling her proclamation for Congress to hold a special session on March 30 to April 1, saying the expected lack of a quorum in the House could give rise to a constitutional violation.

Senate President Franklin Drilon reminded senators that it was their duty to consider the measure for the sake of national interest.

"Each of us would have to view this in accordance with what we believe is in the national interest. In the mind of many senators, the national interest would indicate that we should continue debating on this until we comp up with a system that is most equitable," Drilon said.

Sen. Manuel Roxas II said the passage of the VAT, or even advancing progress on its approval during the special session, would stabilize the country's fiscal situation.

"Economic momentum is made up of many factors. The fiscal and financial stability is an important factor. It is certainly better to have the work on VAT completed than not completed," Roxas told reporters.

Arroyo, who was congressman for nine years, said it would be very hard for the Senate to muster a quorum, but even harder for the House to gather a quorum of 126 members in the middle of the Lenten break.

"Even if there is a quorum in the Senate and there's no quorum in the House, then there's no special session. That's why I said that perhaps, the President would do well just to recall her proclamation to avoid embarrassment on the part of the administration," Arroyo told reporters.

Asked if he thought the President would be more embarrassed by recalling the special session, Arroyo said: "No, that's better because that's her Lenten sacrifice."

Arroyo warned of "cheating" on quorum in the special session, saying he foresees the holding of an "open-close session" in the bigger chamber just to allow the Senate to hold its session and finish the VAT reform measure.

"If the House should resort to calling ... what you call an open-close (session) which means they will just open it and there is no roll call and they just close the session, then that opens the session of both houses into a constitutional challenge," he said.

Drilon said on Monday afternoon that administration and opposition senators sat down for long hours of briefing by top finance and energy officials to "compare notes and figures on the projected effects of the lifting of VAT exemptions on power and fuel products."

It was the most contentious issue in the Senate version of the VAT, which retains the 10 percent VAT rate but lifts exemptions on several goods and sectors, including power and petroleum.

"The consensus is to find ways on how to ensure that the proposed VAT bill would be both effective in addressing the country's financial problems on the long term and equitable, which means that additional taxes should be imposed only on those with the capability to pay and not on those who are already financially vulnerable," Drilon said.

He said another VAT briefing will resume on Monday. The Senate has held daily briefings on the VAT last week.

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Number of women migrant workers rising, study shows

BAGUIO CITY—The increasing number of women migrant workers is a recent phenomenon that the country has noted but women are not happy about it, according to a study conducted by a Cordillera women's group.

Cynthia Dacanay, former executive director of the Cordillera Women's Education and Resource Center, said women working abroad were more prone to abuses and human rights violations.

"Women migrant workers suffer an added burden because of the nature of their jobs, most of them [work as] domestic helpers and entertainers. They are more vulnerable to abuses, especially in the countries where women are discriminated," Dacanay said.

A recent CWERC study, "Living Tales of Terror: The Hapless Plight of Female Migrant Workers in the Cordillera," estimated that 600,000 Filipinos were working as maids in 19 countries.

"It is no wonder why [some dictionaries] define Filipinas as domestic helpers. Hong Kong [hosts] one of the largest populations of Filipina maids [in the world]. [Filipinas] make up 80 percent of the 170,000 maids in Hong Kong and out of this number, Cordillera women comprise the majority," Dacanay said during a migrant's forum here last week.

She said Filipina entertainers, on the other hand, numbered around 470,000 and were found in five countries.

She said 90 percent of Filipinas who go to Japan were entertainers who actually worked as guest relations officers (GROs) in night clubs. The CWERC estimates the number of entertainers now in Japan at 100,000 to 120,000.

Dacanay said records of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration showed Cordillera as the third region in the country with the highest percentage of women migrant workers.

The CWERC study cited a survey done by the National Statistics Office that showed that 18,000 or 75 percent of overseas Filipino workers from the Cordillera are women, most of them working as maids in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Europe and in North America.

"We saw no substantial differences in the problems and issues faced by our female OFWs in the Cordillera. Their decision to work abroad was necessary for them because there were no jobs available for them in the country," Dacanay said.

"But the problems of OFWs as revealed in the study actually begin right after they decide to work abroad. The primary reason why the OFWs leave in the first place is economic," she said.

The study involved 28 communities in the towns of Tabuk, Pinukpuk, Balbalan, Pasil, Tanudan, Lubuagan and Rizal in Kalinga; Conner in Apayao; Manabo, Sallapadan and Lacub in Abra; Besao and Sabangan in Mt. Province; and Mankayan in Benguet. *Desiree Caluza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Lecture highlights 'Botong' works

ART HISTORIAN and critic Alice Guillermo will give a lecture on Carlos "Botong" Francisco and the National Identity" on Saturday, April 2, at 10 a.m. at the Antipolo Room, Locsin Building, 6752 Ayala corner Makati avenues, Makati.

The lecture will highlight three important works of Francisco, the late muralist and National Artist for Visual Arts, in the collection of Leandro and Cecilia Locsin.

The lecture is being presented by the Museum Foundation of the Philippines Inc., a membership and volunteer organization to raise awareness for the Philippine National Museum and Philippine cultural heritage.

Registration begins at exactly 9:30 a. m. Due to limited seats, only 35 persons can be accommodated.

For advance registration, call 404-2685, 0918-585-0383 and 0916-916-2999 (Elvie Magpayo or Dindin Araneta). Fee is P50 for foundation members and P100 for non-members.

RP bet wins first Miss Asean tilt

By Armin Adina

JHEZARIE Javier of the Philippines waves to the crowd after being crowned as first Miss Asean in Jakarta. AFP

THE PHILIPPINES' Jhezarie Javier bested seven other representatives from member-countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to win the first Miss Asean crown in Jakarta on Saturday.

"I feel very happy and blessed," Javier said upon her arrival in Manila from Indonesia.

The pageant, held in Jakarta and organized by the Asean Business and Advisory Council, aimed at promoting the business and tourism potentials of the region.

Aside from the Philippines and Indonesia, the Asean members are Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Brunei and Vietnam. Laos and Cambodia were not able to send delegates to the pageant.

Imelda Fransisca of Indonesia was first runner-up and bagged the Miss Favorite title. Thailand's Panisa Chaikanarakkul was second runner-up and chosen Miss Friendship.

Classical pianist Ei Yupa Win from Burma was adjudged Miss Talent while Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Houng was Miss Samsung.

The delegates wore traditional costumes in the pageant. Their evening gowns were designed by Indonesian couturier Sebastian Gunawan. There was no swimsuit competition.

Among the guests was Miss World 2004 semifinalist Sarah Davies from Australia.

Javier, a hotel and restaurant management graduate from the University of Santo Tomas, also took home the "Natural Beauty" award. She represented the Philippines in the Miss International contest in Tokyo in 2003.

"I chose not to wear too much makeup. Even before the pageant night, we were judged by the way we act, dress, put on make up," she said. Sixty-percent of the scores were taken from the jury interview before the pageant.

As Miss Asean, Javier will be based in Indonesia for one year to serve as spokesperson of the regional grouping.

Former PBA star pleads not guilty in US killing

"FOR A minute, he was speechless. And soon, tears rolled down his face."

This was how Rep. Monico Puentevella (Bacolod City) described Rudy Distrito when he visited him Monday at Clark County Detention Center in Las Vegas, Nevada, where the former basketball star was detained on murder charges.

"He (Distrito) thought he was already forgotten and cried, realizing he had visitors from Bacolod City," said Puentevella, who was in LA to witness the fight of Filipino boxer Manny Pacquiao and Mexican Erik Morales.

He said in a telephone interview that he was allowed to talk to Distrito through a TV monitor for 21 minutes until the line was cut off.

Distrito, 47, is facing murder charges for allegedly stabbing to death Juan Amaya, 24, a Mexican-American, following a heated argument at 4805 Deckow Lane Apartments, near the Koval Tropacina in Las Vegas on Nov. 24, 2004.

During his arraignment yesterday, Distrito pleaded not guilty to the crime. The LA court had set a $500,000 bail and a Nov. 14 trial date.

Lawyers for Distrito, Robert Langford and Susan Burke, characterized the stabbing death as self-defense, while prosecutors called it a deliberate act of revenge after Amaya married Distrito's girlfriend, according to Agence France-Presse.

"He started the fight," Chief Deputy District Attorney Bill Berret was quoted by AFP as saying. "The defendant chased the victim down a staircase, had him in a chokehold, and stabbed him in the back."

A native of Bacolod, Distrito was known as "The Destroyer" for his aggressive defensive play during his 15 years in the Philippine Basketball Association.

He ended his 15-year stint in the PBA in 1995 following the league's decision to ban him for life after committing a flagrant foul against an opponent.

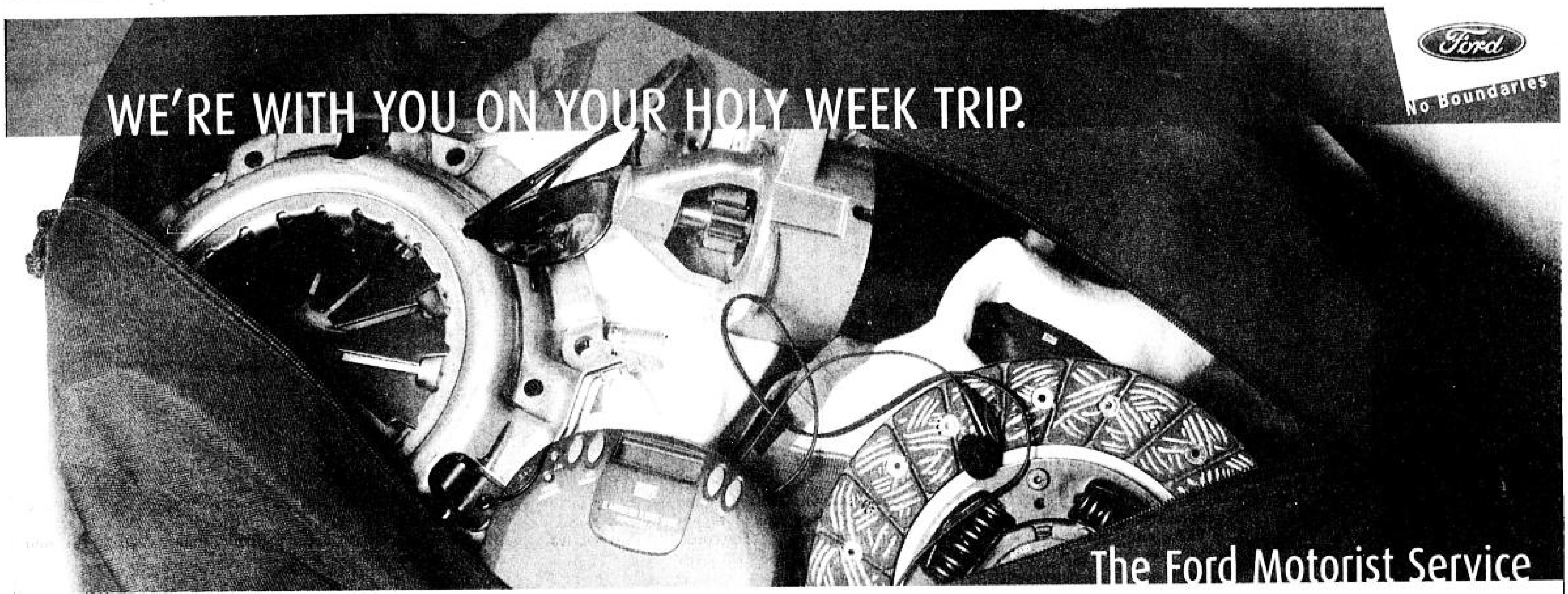
Puentevella said Distrito had aged a lot. "He has a lot of white hair and has lost weight. Being behind bars must have given him a lot of stress."

The congressman said the former PBA star had told him that he was merely acting in self-defense when he stabbed Amaya. The victim, Distrito claimed, was a drug peddler.

Puentevella said Distrito wanted to tell his family and friends in Bacolod not to worry about him and that he wanted to see his family who is based in Los Angeles.

"This is a sad story because at one time you are at the top of the pedestal of your basketball career and suddenly, you are behind bars," the lawmaker said. "These are the ironies in life where, all of a sudden he has become a suspected murderer here in Las Vegas."

Carla P. Gomez, PDI Visayas Bureau, with a report from AFP



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'Stairway to Heaven' drawing devotees to Mt. Banahaw village

From page A1

matic physical healer and spiritual guru, Fr. Joey Faller, as the principal overseer.

Healing ministry

For the past several years, the name of Faller, who was ordained priest in 1989 after graduating from St. Francis Seminary in Lipa, Batangas, has been an icon in the field of "healing ministry."

This came after he left a mark in his mission with the Catholic Charismatic Community as its longtime director in the Diocese of Lucena.

He narrated that in 1991 during his charismatic days, lots of his spiritual sisters and brothers would come to him and surprise him with stories about how he healed someone just by praying for the sick.

"They kept on insisting that I have a gift for healing. But I kept on denying it. For me, it was simply a part of my priestly job. Besides, I've since been imbued with medical reasons than miracles," he recalled.

Born to a family of doctors in this placid town, some 128 km south of Manila, Faller found himself in the crossroad of his chosen vocation when he experienced the Lord's genuine call for him to establish and lead a "healing ministry."

"I always had this vision that I was in a big place, a healing center where lots of people would come even from outside the country. But I just laughed to myself. I considered it then as a silly idea," he said.

Accident

A vehicular accident in the highway of Sto. Tomas, Batangas, in 1994 changed everything in the life of the 6-foot tall priest, who entered the seminary in high school for the mere purpose of developing himself as a good basketball player.

"It took me four years and a tragic accident before I realized that [the] healing ministry was really for me. That incident changed my life," Faller said.

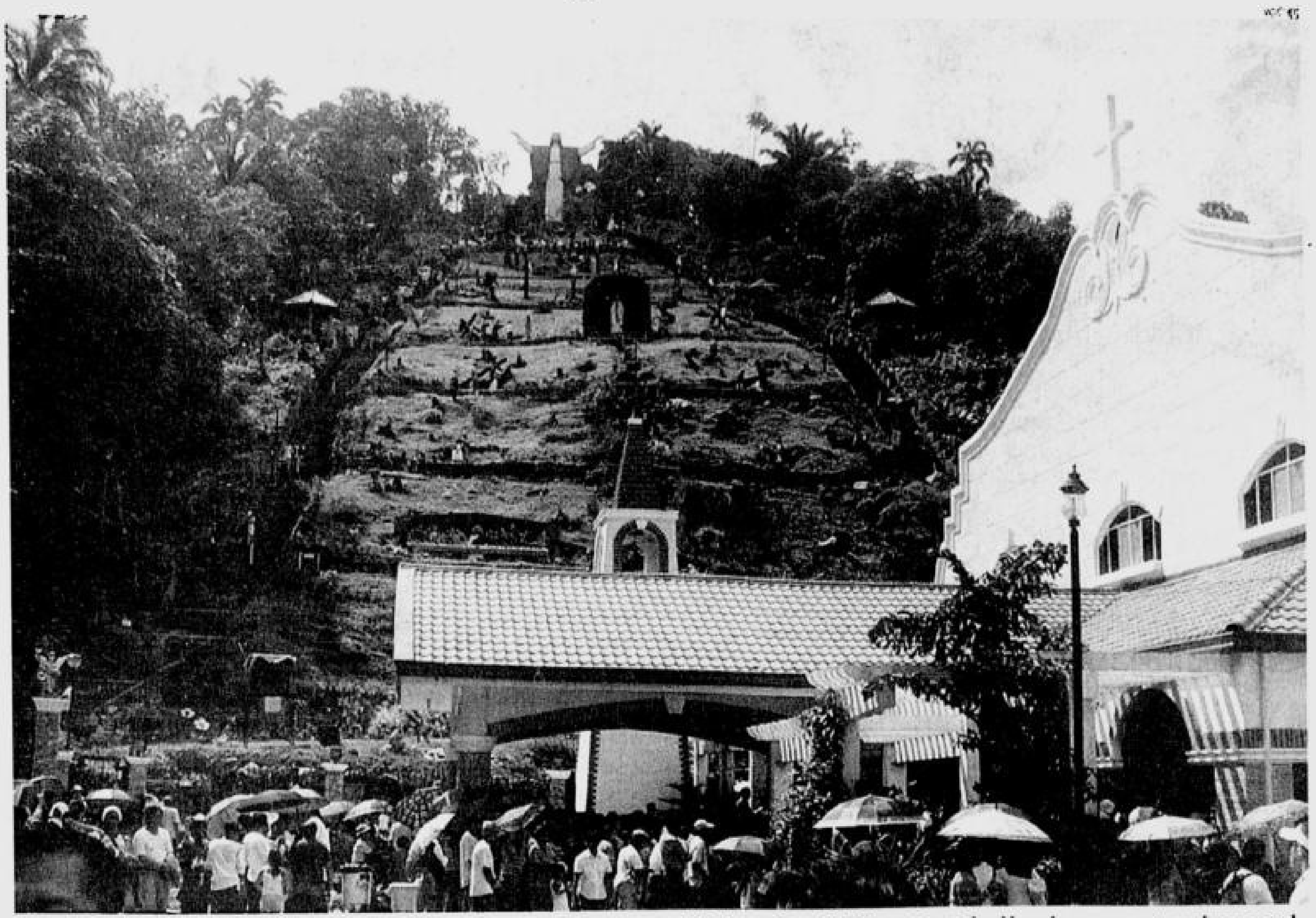
The car accident permanently damaged the ulnar nerve of his right hand, paralyzing two of his fingers, making it look like the hand of the resurrected Christ and the Sto. Niño.

He recalled that after the accident, he was in constant deep meditation to the point of sometimes blaming the Lord for what had happened to him.

Prior to the accident, after he was ordained priest, his loved ones in the family also died one after the other. "But the Lord whispered to me and asked me to glance back. Then I saw the image of the hand of the blessed Sto. Niño as if telling me, 'welcome to the club'."

But for Faller, the confusion never ended and kept on disturbing his peace.

"During that time, my point of view as far as healing was concerned was very much influenced by my family's medical background. Besides, I'm just a plain graduate of theology and philosophy. I knew nothing about the ministry of healing," said the reluctant would-be priest-healer, who has a doctor for a father, a nurse for a mother, another two doctor siblings and a hospital for the family business.



IT TAKES 292 steps to get to the 50-foot concrete icon of the resurrected Christ, who, with His outstretched hands, appears to welcome and embrace the devotees.

DELFIN MALLARI/PDI SOUTHERN LUZON BUREAU

Instrument

Then, while he was in Rome in 1998 attending an international charismatic congress, he met Charles Whitehead, president of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, who helped him with prayers to ease his predicament.

"In his (Whitehead) vision, he saw me in a big, big building with lots of sick people around but I was the only one working. He told me to go on because God was with me. He confirmed that I was being invited by the Lord to be His instrument to heal people."

"I cried," recalled Faller, with his eyes slowly welling with tears.

Upon his return to the country, he said he gathered all his courage and strength and met with Bishop Ruben Profugo, then the head of the Diocese of Lucena.

He asked permission to establish a "healing center" in a parcel of land in Sariaya town that was donated to him by a benefactor.

But Profugo prevailed upon him to construct it instead in its present site in Lucban. "The Diocese gave me one hectare from its three-hectare property to start my vision of a healing center," Faller said.

He also founded the Kamay ni Hesus Ministry Foundation (KHMF) to initiate the building of his dream healing center.

A concrete church at the base of the adjacent hill was built in the site. It was later called the Kamay ni Hesus Healing Church.

Deluge of miracles

Faller said the KHMF had no funds when they started, but a deluge of miracles happened and pledges poured.

"From 1999 to 2002, what we did was mostly planning because we didn't have the money yet for the project. But since the Lord was with us, we were able to build the church for a record one year and three months, from Feb. 2, 2002 up to May 13, 2003," he said.

"The church was built by the Catholic faithful, rich and poor alike—from the Philippines and out of the country," the priest said.

Faller also conducts 22 regular healing Masses all over the country.

At the forefront of the fund campaign are the member communities of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the Philippines and several Catholic communities from here and abroad.

The priest said the colossal Via Dolorosa and the grotto of the Virgin Mary were not inherent components of the planned spiritual center.

Baffling incident

"I also envisioned a grotto within the complex but only a simple one. But a miracle happened," Faller said.

Benny Brizuela, a noted businessman and philanthropist and a KHMF trustee, took a snapshot of the adjacent hill using a disposable instamatic camera.

"I casually took several shots of the hill," Brizuela told the INQUIRER.

But to his surprise, when the film was developed, these came out as one magnificent panoramic view of the entire hill.

Still unable to grasp the meaning of the baffling incident, Brizuela said the succeeding apparition of the Virgin Mary in one of his dreams helped him understand.

"I was ordered by the Lord to start building in that hill what is now the huge panoramic Stations of the Cross and the grotto of Mama Mary," said the businessman, who also miraculously recovered from two heart attacks and one stroke after getting involved in the mission of Faller.

He said he personally supervised the construction and landscaping of the edifice in its steep location.

"We hired Ifugaos for the riprapping," Brizuela said. "With the Lord as our guide and provider, we were able to finish the edifice in one year and one day," he said.

On Monday, the priest/healer was seen being led to different vehicles around the parking lot premises of the famous healing center to comfort and pray for the sick who could no longer attend the Mass that always precedes every healing session.

After reciting prayers for the sick to shoo away demons and evils and cure the lingering malady, the priest has always some comforting words to soothe even the dying. "Just a little more time, I can feel it," he tells the patients.

Footmarks

To help sustain the cost of maintaining the vast healing complex, Faller said the KHMF also offers a personalized concrete slab measuring one square meter for every donation of P2,500, aside from the regular cash donations from "healed patrons."

"They can have their footmarks and the names in our Footprints in the Park," he said.

The center also offers the use of clean toilets for the devotees. One needs only to chip in a few peso coins for the upkeep and maintenance.

Faller said they also plan to put up a retreat center and an infirmary.

"The sick who come from faraway places stay in the infirmary but for only three days to give others a chance. I will soak them with prayers to help them get well," the priest said.

Long lines of buses, cars, jeepneys from as far as Central Luzon and the Bicol regions occupied the vast parking space around the center and both sides along the stretch of the national road, some 100 meters away.

Villa Dolorosa

"It's like that every day. There's always a huge mass of devotees here, especially during this Lenten season," one of the private security guards told the INQUIRER.

A group of local policemen and some volunteers help maintain peace and order in the area.

The hill, facing Lucban, is now called Villa Dolorosa, the Grotto of Healing and Purification.

This cop is a man of the cloth

From page A1

the priest tells the INQUIRER in an interview. "As a policeman, that's your mission, your vocation."

Fr. Rey says it's different, of course, when an officer ignores the rules of engagement and shoots a disarmed and helpless suspect. That's murder, he adds.

Being both a priest and a policeman has enabled Fr. Rey to easily make the slightest moral distinction. To his flock, he's more convincing than a regular priest. And he's practically every inch a policeman like them.

While his primary duty is to "cater to the spiritual needs" of officers, he and 42 other chaplains nationwide receive similar training in basic police work.

They know how to shoot a gun and they hone their skills in annual firearm proficiency tests. They learn hand-to-hand combat. And like the rest of the pack, they have to keep fit and trim those bellies.

Won't fire a single shot

But in case they're caught in an encounter, the priest vows never to fire a single shot.

As a superintendent (or colonel), Fr. Rey is one of the senior officers of the PNP.

He reports both to the PNP chief and to the military ordinary, the bishop in charge of the "diocese" specifically for the armed services.

He receives a monthly salary equivalent to his position. When he reaches the mandatory PNP retirement age of 56, he will get a retirement pay representing all of his years in the police force.

A dream come true

Fr. Rey got the best of both worlds when he joined the PNP's predecessor, the Philippine Constabulary-Integrated National Police, as a chaplain with the rank of 1st lieutenant in 1982. He moved to the PNP when it was formed in 1991.

"I really wanted to be a priest but I also dreamed of becoming a policeman," he recalls.

He wanted to wear the cassock owing to his deeply Catholic upbringing, and the badge because of his father, a policeman in their hometown of Magsinggal in Ilocos Sur.

Young Rey, though, was fascinated neither with the action nor the violence that went with law enforcement.

So having now outlived 11 PNP chiefs, he says his police work has consistently remained focused on his priestly mission.

"My chief mission," he says, "is to provide spiritual guidance to our policemen," a task that's never easy considering all the problems hounding the police force.

Thing of the past

There is widespread belief that as PNP chaplain, he is also in the company of some womanizers, gamblers, executioners—all masquerading as policemen.

But he swears this is a thing of the past.

"Our policemen have made significant changes now," he says. "They're now more religious and more committed to their work and their family."

On Sundays, the PNP chapel in Camp Crame is packed with policemen and their families, a strong sign of a growing spirituality within the organization, he says.

"I suppose many of our policemen are deeply religious," he says. "They don't just show it because they have to protect this macho image."

Generals and other senior officials turn to their priest friends in times of moral crisis, when tough decisions have to be made, he says.

Lack of priests

In the PNP, he says, the problem really is the lack of priests, not the absence of religious faith.

At present, the Chaplain Service has only 43 chaplains serving the needs of around 120,000 policemen and non-uniformed personnel, or a ratio of 2,790 people for one chaplain. The ideal ratio is to have one priest for every 500 officers, he says.

Conscience intact

Fr. Rey sees no immediate solution to the numbers.

What's important is that many policemen still keep their conscience intact, despite the power of the gun.

A priest called Muhammad

From page A1

in theory, but he just tolerates me," said the 64-year-old academic and former theologian.

Anger was also the reaction of some of his former parishioners and friends, he said.

It started with a challenge

But Soria said he never backed down from his decision, knowing that even the Devil could not stop him from removing his priestly robes and embracing Islam.

It was a decision that was political and even intellectual, he said, but it was also a matter of faith.

His change of faith began when he challenged former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Gov. Nur Misuari's statement that everyone in Mindanao was a Moro.

He argued that many groups other than Muslims also lived in Mindanao, among them the Manobo and Sama tribes. At that time, he was teaching theology at the Ateneo de Manila University.

Soria, a native of Dipolog City, then studied the history of Mindanao in order to back his argument with historical and sociological proofs. While he did find evidence that not all who lived in Mindanao were Moros, he also discovered something else.

"I saw that the negative things associated with Muslims were not true, that they were actually being oppressed by the colonialists," he said.

"I thought Muslims were stupid and not well-informed, and I wanted to convert them to Christianity," Soria said.

But the opposite happened, he said.

A different gospel

He came across the Gospel of Barnabas, a work purporting to be a depiction of the life of Jesus by his disciple Barnabas, and was "convinced" it held the truth.

The Gospel of Barnabas says Jesus did not die from crucifixion but actually ascended to heaven alive. The man who was crucified was actually Judas Iscariot, the traitor. The gospel also foretells the coming of Muhammad.

Majority of academics, including Christians and some Muslims, dismiss the Barnabas gospel as a pious fraud, but some Muslim scholars believe it to be genuine.

Doubts about Trinity

Soria said he had doubts about his faith as early as the time he was training to become a priest. He questioned the Christian concept of the Trinity and, when he was 21, even had an argument about it with his late father.

When a seminarian has doubts about his faith, he leaves, said Soria. But he did not want to do that, so he continued his vocation and became a priest in 1988.

His deeply Catholic upbringing had somehow influenced him into the religious life, he said. But that did not stop him from raising questions about his religion.

He worked with two parishes in Taguig and another in Caloocan. During this time, he became more and more outspoken about his doubts about the Catholic faith.

Soon, he was transferred to the University of the Philippines-Diliman parish as assistant to "running priest" Fr. Roberto Reyes, a longtime friend.

Soria said his transfer to UP was meant to give a safe sanctuary for his views. But the liberal atmosphere at the university actually strengthened his resolve to make a momentous decision: To convert to Islam.

End to all doubts

Soria became a Muslim on Sept. 2, 2002, some 14 years after he was ordained a priest.

Unlike his doubt-riddled career as a diocesan priest, his conversion to Islam was a decision he was very sure of, he said.

He is now used to the Muslim way of life and has even gone on five pilgrimages to Mecca, through the Islamic Dawah Movement, of which he is a member.

His family and some of his friends could not understand his choice, but some have been supportive, he said. One of them is his friend "through-thick-and-thin"—Father Reyes.

Sex is human

Last year, Soria married Hannah, 24, after a betrothal arranged by a Baclaran *imam* (teacher).

As a priest, he led a "really celibate" life, but since converting to Islam, he said, he has adopted the Koran's teaching that sex is human and not to be disdained.

An activist during his teaching days at Ateneo, Soria is currently working with various groups to defuse Muslim-Christian tensions, particularly after the bloody Camp Bagong Diwa prison siege last week.

Tension between 2 faiths

He said tension already existed between the two faiths in this predominantly Catholic nation, but it only worsened because of the government's handling of the attempted jailbreak.

Historically, terrorism has been committed by those in power, he said. This was true even during the Spanish rule in the Philippines, except that it was the colonizers who portrayed the indios as the terrorists.

"[Jose] Rizal, [Andres] Bonifacio were terrorists, according to the Spaniards. Today, they are national heroes," he said.

Soria said he was not ready to become an *imam*.

"I can be but I'd rather not. I don't feel I'm well-versed enough with the Muslim tradition," he said.

Father Stan, still

Even though he changed his name to Muhammad, Soria said his friends still call him Father Stan, "including the Muslims."

"My Arab Muslim friends told me I should not change my name, so people would know I'm a Catholic priest who converted to Islam," he said.

"*Pinagmamalaki nila yun* (They are proud of that)," he said.

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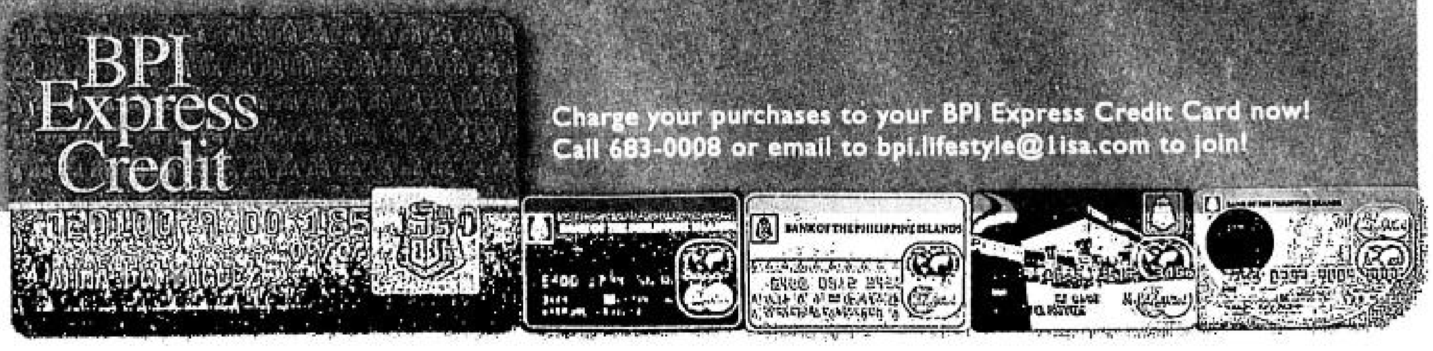

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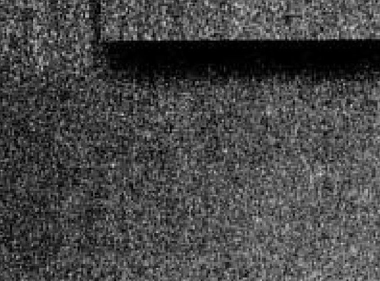

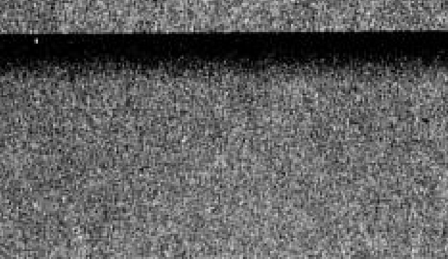

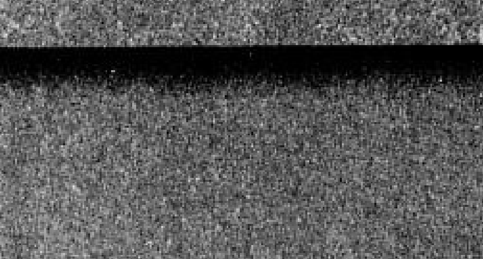

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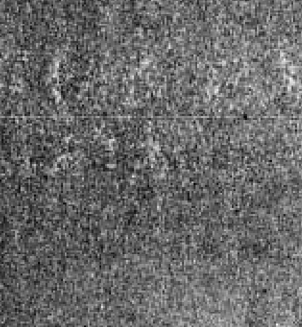

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Clean up, vacationers told

By Blanche S. Rivera

THIS Holy Week, don't make another mountain of trash.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources yesterday appealed to vacationers to properly dispose of their waste to avoid the closure of the country's famous vacation sites.

It cited the cases of Mt. Banahaw and the San Cristobal Protected Landscape in Quezon, which had been closed to pilgrims and tourists since last year because of the truckloads of garbage left by visitors.

In a statement, Environment Secretary Michael Defensor said the local governments had to take "drastic measures" in the two places because of the alarming volume of trash brought by visitors during the Holy Week observance last year.

Eleven truckloads of garbage, mostly plastic materials, Styrofor containers, empty water bottles and cans, were collected from Banahaw in April last year. They were left by mountaineers and pilgrims, the DENR said.

The two sites draw almost half a million tourists during the Lenten season every year.

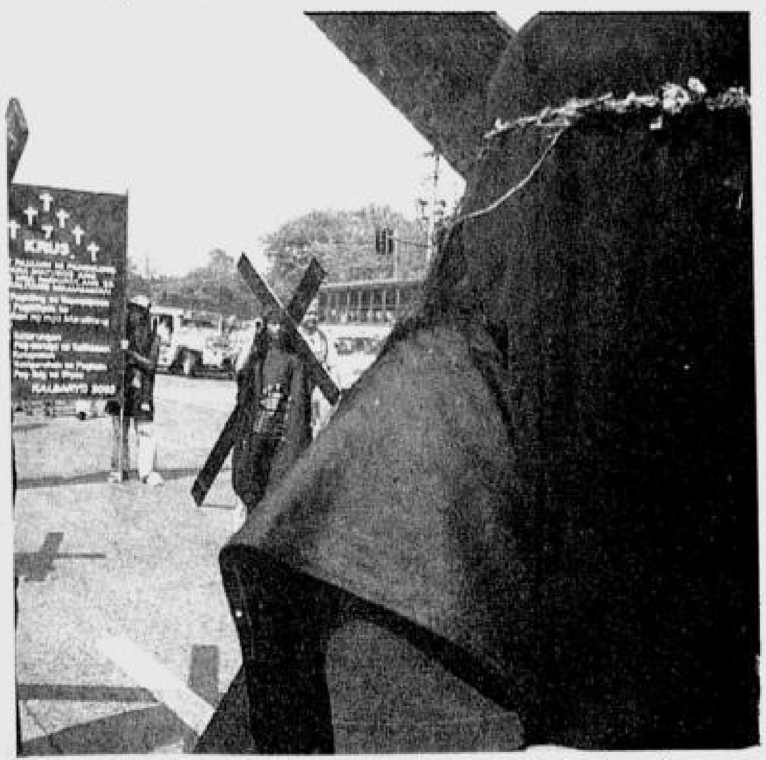
Last year, the Protected Area Management Board ordered the closure of the mystical mountain and the San Cristobal Landscape to visitors until 2009.

Defensor urged commuters not to throw food wrappers, bottles and packages on the roads.

The Environmental Management Bureau estimates that each Filipino in the urban areas produces 0.6 kilos of trash daily, while the rural dweller produces 0.3 kilos.

In Metro Manila, this translates to about 6,000 tons of garbage everyday.

"The solution to the solid waste problem and flooding does not rest on any single government agency, but on the collective efforts of everyone. What better time for us all to see this affirmation of our concern for the environment than this Lenten season," Defensor said.



SEVEN CROSSES are carried by demonstrators from the urban poor who hold a procession going to the NHA, DAR, DENR and Quezon City Hall where a Mass is celebrated. JOAN BONDOC

Bomb trainer of Abu falls

From page A1

capture after he was wounded in November.

If what Rohmat said was true, it would belie earlier military reports that Janjalani had been killed in a military bombing in Maguindanao last year.

Only 25 years old, Rohmat—also alias Hamdan and Akil—was the liaison officer with the ASG of the Southeast Asian regional terror network Jemaah Islamiyah, the military statement said.

Tall and slim, he carried a deep scar on the right side of his mouth—the only visible mark in his face that jarred with his boyish looks.

He and a Filipino companion were arrested at a military checkpoint in Datu Saudi Ampatuan, Maguindanao, last March 16 while on board a motorcycle, the military said.

Couldn't speak Tagalog

Soldiers became suspicious of him because he could not speak Tagalog well.

Big blow to JI

Rohmat was the latest of a number of Indonesian militants arrested in the country in recent years for alleged involvement with JI.

They included three Indonesians who, along with an ASG member, were arrested in Zamboanga last Dec. 14.

The top JI operative in the country, Fathur Roman Al-Ghozi, was killed in North Cotabato in 2003 after escaping from a Camp Crame detention center.

"With Zaki's capture, the Philippine government dealt another serious blow to the JI's and the ASG's financial linkages, operational capability and organizational morale," declared Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Edilberto Adan as the Indonesian stood behind him.

Long terror record

"It was revealed by our suspect Zaki that he was present during the planning of the bombing. Charges that will be filed are now being prepared," Adan said.

When pressed by reporters, Adan could not elaborate on the alleged bomb conspiracy.

"The name Zaki has been appearing in our various investigations of captured personalities," he said. "It is very possible that he is involved in the other atrocities or operations of the Abu Sayyaf in the previous years."

Link to JI leadership

Authorities said Rohmat illegally entered the country through Zamboanga City in January 2000.

He told investigators that he was appointed by a JI leader named Zulkifly, a top regional terror suspect arrested in Malaysia two years ago, as liaison officer with the ASG, Adan said in a statement.

Adan said Rohmat trained in the MILF's Camp Abubakar in Maguindanao and, when it was overrun by government forces in 2000, Rohmat's group moved to Camp Jabal Quba in Butig, Lanao del Sur.

Top 'graduate'

There he finished top of his "class" in October 2002 and the following year began training ASG members on explosives in Patikul, Jolo, Sulu.

Rohmat also told investigators that he was wounded last November in an air raid in Datu Piang but was sheltered by some elements of the MILF's 105th Base Command while he recuperated, the military said.

Authorities immediately cleared the MILF of links to the JI.

MILF defended

"The involvement of the MILF here is never on an organizational basis. Certain members may now and then cooperate, never the organization," Defense Undersecretary Ricardo Blancaflor said.

On the other hand, he said, the "tactical alliance between the Abu Sayyaf and JI has shown itself several times in the past."

Immigration Commissioner Alipio Fernandez said he issued a "mission order" against Rohmat last March 13 based on Army intelligence reports.

The mission order empowers immigration agents to detain a suspected illegal alien.

Real identity

Fernandez said it was only during Rohmat's interrogation that the latter confessed his true identity.

He said the Indonesian would undergo deportation proceedings for being an undesirable alien but only after criminal charges against him were resolved.

Malacañang commended the military and the Bureau of Immigration for Rohmat's arrest.

Dealing with 'bad eggs'

"The Philippines is doing its share in fighting terrorism in this part of the world and we will continue to work with our neighbors in seeing to it that the threat is contained," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said.

Bunye said the government drive against terrorism had nothing to do with religion.

"Religious faith is never an issue in our campaign against terrorism," Bunye said. "This is a matter of enforcing the rule of law among all, regardless of creed, ethnic origin or social station."

Bunye added: "We have to deal with the bad eggs hiding under the cloak of religion to foment terrorist goals." *With reports from Leila B. Salaverria, Christine O. Avendaño, AP, Reuters*

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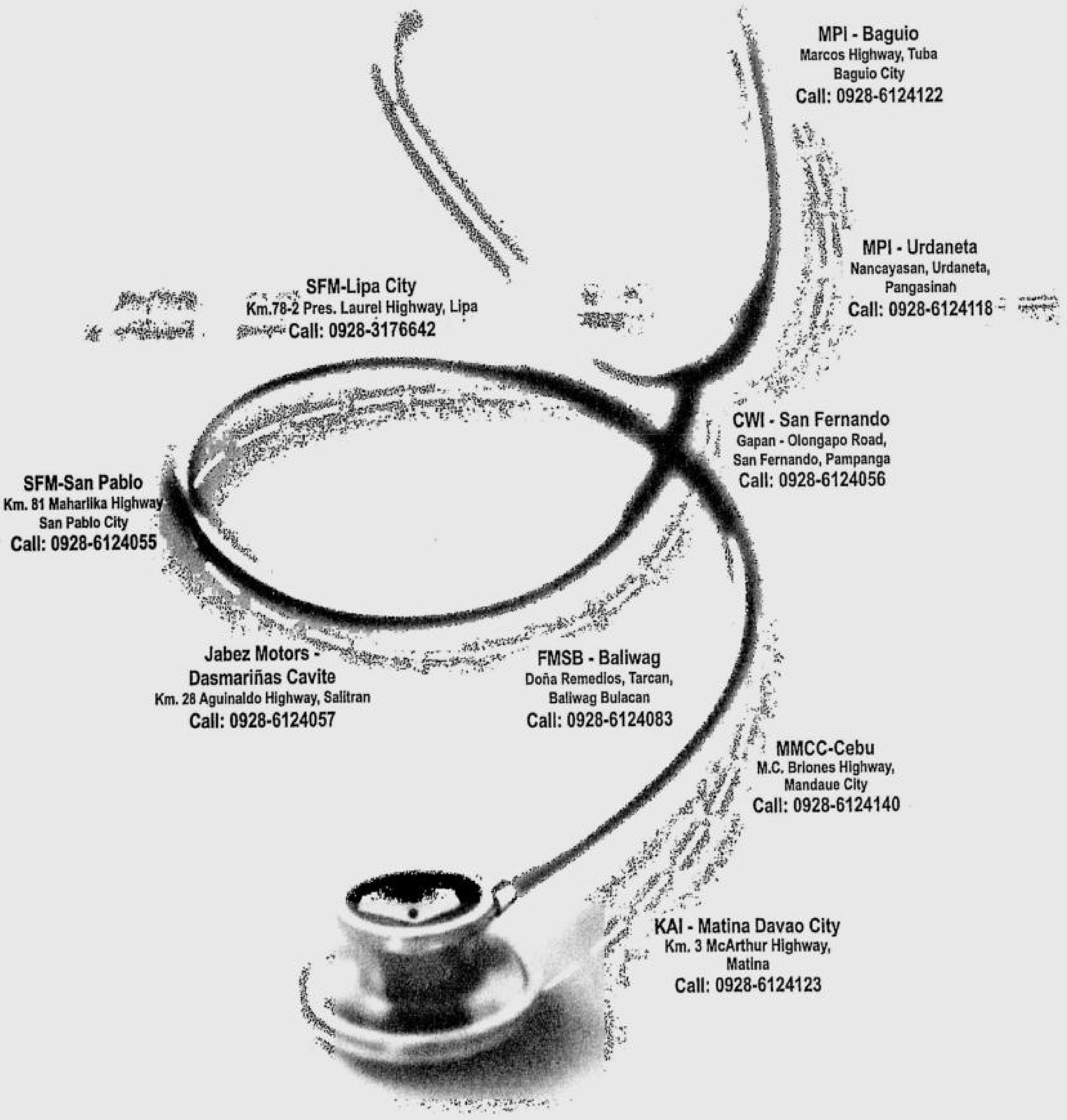

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Teddyboy told: No. 4 paper can't be taken over by No. 7

From page A1

la Standard CEO Rogelio Salazar introduced Locsin as the "new publisher."

The position of publisher has been vacant since its last publisher, Alejandro del Rosario, was named ambassador to Hungary in 2002.

Surprised

Locsin met with Standard employees to announce the "merger" of the two newspapers and his takeover as publisher, an announcement which caught the employees by surprise. Also in the same meeting, Locsin reportedly claimed that he already owns 45 percent of the new Manila Standard Today.

Locsin also said he was bringing in his staff from his old newspaper, a move perceived by the Standard staff as a threat to their positions because of redundancy.

Villamente said the union was "surprised by the events."

"It happened so fast and it was not even made clear to us what really happened. Locsin said there was a corporate merger, but Salazar told us there was only a joining of forces," Villamente said.

Came on too strong

A Manila Standard editor said Locsin "came on too strong" during that March 6 meeting.

But "what happened afterwards was confusing," he said.

Locsin wanted to bring in 23 personnel from Today. He also wanted to "control" the Opinion, Business and Good Life sections, and was pushing for the accommodation of 14 columnists from Today to the Manila Standard.

"So everybody was asking, if we are the surviving organization, why are we being eased out?" the editor said, on condition that he would not be named.

Even the artists were complaining when they were "summoned" to the Today office in Makati, the editor also said.

"We don't really know how to call the situation here right now. But we have an expanded business section, and there are beats with a Manila Standard reporter and a counterpart from Today," he added.

Today's debts

"Locsin said the Today reporters were coming in as regulars. That's a violation again because there must be a six-month probationary period," Villamente said.

He said the union was also worried that Manila Standard will have to assume the debts and liabilities incurred by Today. "We have been cost cutting, so where will we get these funds?" Villamente said.

The union called for a general assembly on March 13, and after consulting with its mother union, the Federation of Free Workers, the Manila Standard employees filed a complaint before the PPI on March 21.

Violations

In a letter sent to Amado Macasaet, PPI chair, dated March 21, Antonio Macapagal, union president, said that Locsin had no right to hold on to his position as Manila Standard Today publisher and Makati City congressman at the same time.

He based the conflict-of-interest violations on at least three provisions of the Philippine Journalists' Code of Ethics instituted and enforced by the PPI.

Macapagal explained that provision No. 5 of the Code of Ethics stipulates that a journalist "shall not let personal motives or interests influence me in the performance of my duties; nor shall I accept or offer any payment, gift or other consideration of a nature which may cast doubt on my professional integrity."

'Conscience clause'

Macapagal said Locsin's twin positions also violated provision No. 10, which says journalists "shall accept only such tasks as more compatible with the integrity and dignity of my profession, invoking the 'conscience clause' when duties imposed on me conflict with the voice of my conscience."

He also said Locsin's "conflict of interest" violated the Code's provision No. 11 which reads that journalists "should conduct (themselves) in public or while performing my duties as journalists in such manner as to maintain the dignity of my profession. When in doubt, decency should be my watchword."

House ethics committee

Villamente said the PPI complaint was "only the beginning" and that they are preparing to bring the matter up to the House ethics committee questioning the conflict of interest.

He added: "In Locsin's desperation to save face after his two failed newspapers, he is bullying us and peddled lies to keep him afloat." Villamente explained that Locsin had been pressuring Yap-Daza to sign regular appointment papers of Today staff. "Why cannot he sign? It's because of his position as congressman."

'Dubious'

Villamente also called Locsin's boast of owning 45 percent of the Standard as "dubious." "Assuming this is true, *bakit sya ang naghahari?* (Why is he lording it over?). We want to know from where he derives his authority."

Clarifications

Locsin, Villamente charged, also ordered the change of the paper's masthead without informing Razon.

In a letter to Razon, editors, reporters and staff of the Manila Standard asked for clarifications on the supposed "merger" of the two papers.

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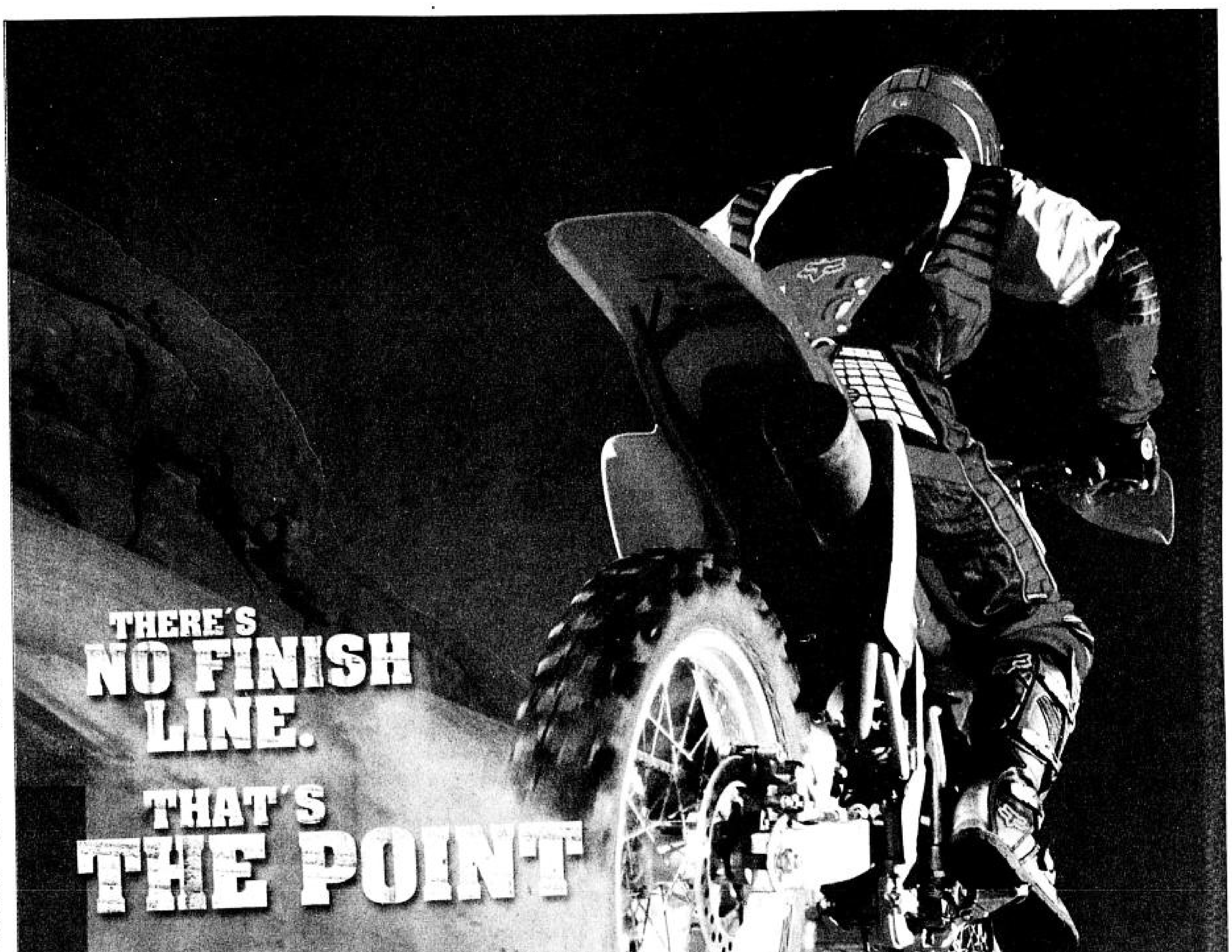
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The WORLD

Editor **Luverne B. Gueco**

Group vows to attack churches in Middle East

DOHA—An unknown group has claimed responsibility for a Qatar suicide bombing that killed a Briton, and vowed to hit churches and "crusader" military bases in the region, an Internet statement posted on Tuesday said.

The statement came as Qatari officials hunted for clues of any al-Qaida involvement in Saturday's attack, the first in the Gulf Arab state, which hosts the US Central Command that directed the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

"We claim responsibility for the historic Qatar operation, carried out by a lion of the Army of the Levant," the statement posted on a website used by Islamists said.

Addressing what it called "the supporters of the devil," the group warned "America, Britain and Italy and all those who have defiled the lands of Islam be ready for the grand surprise."

"The Qatar operation is the beginning," it added.

The authenticity of the statement could not be confirmed, but a Qatari government spokesperson and a London-based Islamist activist have cast doubt on it.

"So far I do not think it is serious," Islamist Yasser al-Sirri said, adding that the statement did not have the Islamist formulations often used by militant groups.

The Army of the Levant had earlier said it carried out the attack and that it would issue a full statement later.

Qatari officials have said that 16 other people, mostly Arabs and Asians, were wounded in the bombing carried out by an Egyptian suicide bomber who detonated a car laden with explosives at a theater popular with Westerners.

Sources in Doha have said the bomber, named as Omar Ahmad Abdullah Ali, was employed at the IT department in state-run Qatar Petroleum which runs Qatar's rich oil and gas sectors.

The attack came two days after the suspected al-Qaida leader in Saudi Arabia urged militants in Qatar and other Gulf Arab states to wage holy war against "crusaders" in the region.

Tuesday's statement said the Army of the Levant had no links to any group in the Palestinian territories or Lebanon—part of the Middle East known as the Levant. *Reuters*

SPRING CLIMB

A crowd climbs up the Pyramid of the Sun during the celebrations for the Spring solstice in the Teotihuacan archeological site, state of Mexico, March 21.

AFP

North Korea says it has 'increased nuclear arms'

SEOUL—North Korea said Monday it had increased its nuclear arsenal in preparation for a preemptive invasion by the United States, the Yonhap news agency quoted Pyongyang's state media as saying.

The Stalinist regime vowed last month to bolster its nuclear weapons, as it abruptly pulled out of multiparty talks aimed to halt its nuclear weapons program and accused Washington of plotting to overthrow it.

"We have taken a serious measure by increasing nuclear arms in preparation for any invasions by enemies," Yonhap quoted the North Korean Central Broadcasting Station as saying late Monday.

It said joint US-South Korean military maneuvers that started at the weekend were "a preparatory war against us."

The latest statement came as US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wrapped up a tour of the region in which the nuclear standoff topped the agenda.

In a dramatic rejection of the Bush administration's policy on North Korea, the reclusive state said last month it would no longer engage in the six-party talks over its nuclear weapons program.

"We had already taken the resolute action of pulling out of the (Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty) and have manufactured nukes for self-defense to cope with the Bush administration's ever-more-undisguised policy to isolate and stifle the DPRK (North Korea)," state media said at the time.

Washington believes North Korea possesses one or two crude bombs and may have reprocessed enough plutonium for half-a-dozen more, from spent fuel rods at its Yongbyon nuclear complex.

"(North Korea's) nuclear weapons will remain nuclear deterrent for self-defense under any circumstances," the statement said.

It accused Washington of seeking to topple North Korea's political system at any cost and threatening it with nuclear attack.

"This compels us to take a measure to bolster (North Korea's) nuclear weapons arsenal in order to protect the ideology, system, freedom and democracy chosen by the people in the DPRK," it said. *AFP*

Camilla will be British queen, says gov't

LONDON—Royal bride-to-be Camilla Parker Bowles will officially become British queen after fiance Prince Charles takes the throne, the government admitted Monday, despite earlier assurances designed to assuage fans of the late Princess Diana.

Parker Bowles will become Duchess of Cornwall once she marries Charles on April 8, and will officially take the title of Princess Consort after he becomes monarch following the eventual death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II.

These titles, unveiled when the pair's impending marriage was announced in February, have been seen as a sop to popular opinion, which opinion polls have shown to be largely hostile to the prospect of a Queen Camilla.

Many Britons say they blame Parker Bowles' long affair with Charles for the breakup of his first marriage to the hugely popular Diana, who died in a Paris car crash in 1997.

However, the Department of Constitutional Affairs confirmed on Monday that Parker Bowles would be queen once Charles takes the throne.

"Technically, she will be queen," department spokesperson Zoe Campbell said.

The news followed a written House of Commons question to the department by Andrew Mackinlay, a lawmaker for the ruling Labor Party, who asked whether the April 8 marriage would be "morganatic."

He was using an arcane term referring to cases in which someone of royal or noble birth marries someone of lower rank and does not share any titles.

Constitutional Affairs Minister Christopher Leslie gave a simple reply: "No."

"This is absolutely unequivocal that she automatically becomes queen when he becomes king," Mackinlay said on Monday.

The Department of Constitutional Affairs stressed, however, that much of the argument was academic, given the fact that Britain has no formal constitution, just a series of laws and conventions that have evolved over the centuries.

There was no single law stating that someone with Parker Bowles' future position "will be known as queen," Campbell said.

"When you say constitutional and legal norms, a lot of it is down to convention rather than legislation, which is why she can be referred to as whatever she likes without having to change the law," she said. "She can be referred to as the Duchess of Cornwall or Princess Consort without any change to the law." *AFP*

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Jordan returns top diplomat to Iraq

BAGHDAD—Jordan announced its top diplomat would return to Iraq only days after the neighboring countries withdrew their highest envoys amid heightened tensions.

King Abdullah II on Monday ordered the return of Jordan's top diplomat in Iraq, days after the two neighbors withdrew their envoys in a dispute over the infiltration of insurgents across the border, the official Jordanian news agency reported.

Petra reported that the king ordered the Jordanian charge d'affaires to return to the embassy in Baghdad "to keep the good relations between the two brotherly countries."

Iraq and Jordan engaged in a tit-for-tat withdrawal of envoys Sunday in a dispute over Iraqi claims that Jordan was failing to stop would-be insurgents from slipping across the border and allegations that a Jordanian had carried out a deadly suicide attack this month.

Both countries said the diplomats were being recalled for "consultations."

In a bid to heal the rift, Jordan's Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez met outgoing Iraqi President Ghazi Al Yawar and Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari on Monday in Algiers, Algeria, where they are attending the Arab summit that starts Tuesday.

Petra quoted Fayez in Algiers as condemning the insurgency in Iraq and saying: "Terror knows no religion or nationality and Jordan has faced several terrorist attempts targeting its security and stability.

Tension between the two countries boiled over last week. At one point, Iraqi demonstrators angered over the alleged involvement of a Jordanian in a deadly suicide bombing hoisted the Iraqi flag at the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad.

And the leading political party, the United Iraqi Alliance, claimed Jordan was allowing insurgents to cross into Iraq. *AP*

Caribbean vulnerable to tsunami, says study

WASHINGTON—Large cracks off the coast of Puerto Rico show there is a strong chance of quakes, landslides and tsunamis in the Caribbean region, geologists said on Wednesday.

Sonar readings of the Puerto Rican trench, where the North American and Caribbean plates meet, show long, deep cracks, said Nancy Grindlay and Meghan Hearne of the University of North Carolina Wilmington and Paul Mann of the University of Texas at Austin.

That fits in with historical reports of tsunamis in the area, some of which have the potential to be very large, the three scientists reported in the journal Eos.

"I marked out faults and what appear to be landslide deposits," Grindlay said in a telephone interview.

"We also identified these large cracks on the sea floor that appear to have potential for future landslides. They are about 35 to 40 km long and they are right off the north coast of Puerto Rico."

They range in depth from 1,000 meters to 3,000 meters, she said, and some are similar to the fault that caused the Dec. 26 quake off the coast of Indonesia that generated the tsunami that left 300,000 people dead or missing in the Indian Ocean area.

As with all quakes, it was impossible to predict when one would occur and what sort of tsunami it might generate, if it caused one at all, Grindlay said. *Reuters*

Student kills 9 in Minnesota

BEMIDJI, Minnesota—A high school student went on a shooting rampage on an Indian reservation Monday, killing his grandparents at their home and then seven people at his school, grinning and waving as he fired, authorities and witnesses said. The suspect apparently killed himself after exchanging gunfire with police.

It was the United States' worst school shooting since the Columbine massacre in 1999 that killed 13 people. One student said her classmates pleaded with the gunman to stop shooting.

"You could hear a girl saying, 'No, Jeff, quit, quit. Leave me alone. What are you doing?'" student Sondra Hegstrom told The Pioneer of Bemidji, using the name of the suspected shooter.

Before the shootings at Red Lake High School, the suspect's grandparents were shot in their home and died later. There was no immediate indication of the gunman's motive.

Authorities didn't identify the gunman, but a few media outlets identified him as Jeff Weise, citing students and tribal leaders. Accounts of Weise's age varied from 15 to 17, as did whether he was a current student at the school.

Relatives told the St. Paul Pioneer Press that Weise was a loner who usually wore black and was teased by other kids. Relatives told the newspaper his father committed suicide four years ago, and that his mother was living in a Minneapolis nursing home because she suffered brain injuries in a car accident.

In addition to the shooter, the death toll at the school included five students, a teacher and a security guard, FBI spokesperson Paul McCabe said in Minneapolis. Among the dead was Neva Rogers, 62, a teacher at the school for five or six years, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported.

Fourteen to 15 other students were injured, McCabe said. Some were being cared for in Bemidji, about 32 km south of Red Lake. Authorities closed roads to the reservation in far northern Minnesota while they investigated the shootings.

Hegstrom described the shooter grinning and waving at a student his gun was pointed at, then swiveling to shoot someone else. "I looked him in the eye and ran in the room, and that's when I hid," she told The Pioneer.

McCabe declined to talk about a possible connection between the suspect and the couple killed at the home, but Red Lake Fire Director Roman Stately said they were the grandparents of the gunman. He identified the shooter's grandfather as Daryl Lussier, a longtime officer with the Red Lake Police Department, and said Lussier's guns may have been used in the shootings.

Stately said the shooter had two handguns and a shotgun.

"After he shot a security guard, he walked down the hallway shooting and went into a classroom where he shot a teacher and more students," Stately told Minneapolis television station KARE.

Students and a teacher, Diane Schwanz, said the gunman tried to break down a door to get into her classroom. "I just got on the floor and called the cops," Schwanz told the Pioneer. "I was still just half-believing it."

Ashley Morrison, another student, had taken refuge in Schwanz's classroom. With the shooter banging on the door, she dialed her mother on her cell phone. Her mother, Wendy Morrison, said she could hear gunshots on the line. *AP*

Judge rejects plea to resume tube feeding

PINELLAS PARK, Fla.—A federal judge refused to order the resumption of tube feeding for brain-damaged Florida woman Terri Schiavo on Tuesday after weighing the highly charged right-to-die case.

CNN said that US District Judge James Whittemore issued a ruling rejecting a request by Schiavo's parents for the tube, which was removed on Friday, to be reinserted pending a fresh review of the case.

Whittemore issued his verdict after a two-hour hearing in Tampa, Florida, on Monday on the parents' request for resumed feeding.

Shiavo's parents, Bob and Mary Schindler, have battled for years to keep their 41-year-old daughter alive and were likely to appeal the ruling.

The judge took up the case after the US Congress and President George W. Bush intervened by passing special legislation allowing the parents to go to federal court in their effort to keep Schiavo alive.

Schiavo's feeding tube was removed on the order of a Florida court that first ruled five years ago that the tube could be taken out. Experts said she could be expected to live for one to two weeks without the tube.

Schiavo suffered a heart attack in 1990 that left her in what courts have declared a "persistent vegetative state." State courts have consistently sided with Schiavo's husband and legal guardian, Michael Schiavo, in finding that she would not wish to live in this state.

But her parents have argued their daughter responds to them and could improve with treatment. In the highly unusual intervention, Congress rushed to put together a law allowing the parents to take the case to federal court.

Whittemore had made clear at Monday's hearing that to issue an order to resume feeding he would have to be persuaded of the likely success of the parents' overall case. *Reuters*

Annan presses leaders to adopt UN reforms

UNITED NATIONS—UN Secretary General Kofi Annan threw down the gauntlet to world leaders on Monday, pressing them to adopt the most wide-ranging reforms since the United Nations was founded 60 years ago.

Annan called for an expanded Security Council, fixed rules for when nations could go to war, strengthened human rights and boosted development and trade, as well as an overhaul of the UN bureaucracy.

"This hall has heard enough high-sounding declarations to last us for some decades to come," Annan said in a speech to the UN General Assembly to present his 63-page report, which he called the biggest UN reforms in history.

"We all know what the problems are and we all know what we have promised to achieve. What is need now is not more declarations or promises, but action—action to fulfill the promises already made," he said.

Annan wants the major changes to be agreed at a summit of world leaders at UN headquarters in September, which will mark the UN's 60th anniversary.

"What I am proposing amounts to a comprehensive strategy," he said, urging member states to adopt the package as a whole and steer clear of "a la carte" picking and choosing.

But he now must convince the UN's 191 member states to support his program, and some nations on Monday were already raising concerns about certain parts of the reform package.

One of the most sensitive ideas is to expand the Security Council, with Annan offering two models. One option would add six new members to its five permanent powers: Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

The other would add a third tier of semipermanent members to the council, the top UN body for international peace and security.

Annan said the council should adopt a resolution setting guidelines to determine when military action can be authorized, an issue in the spotlight since the United States invaded Iraq without council approval. *AFP*

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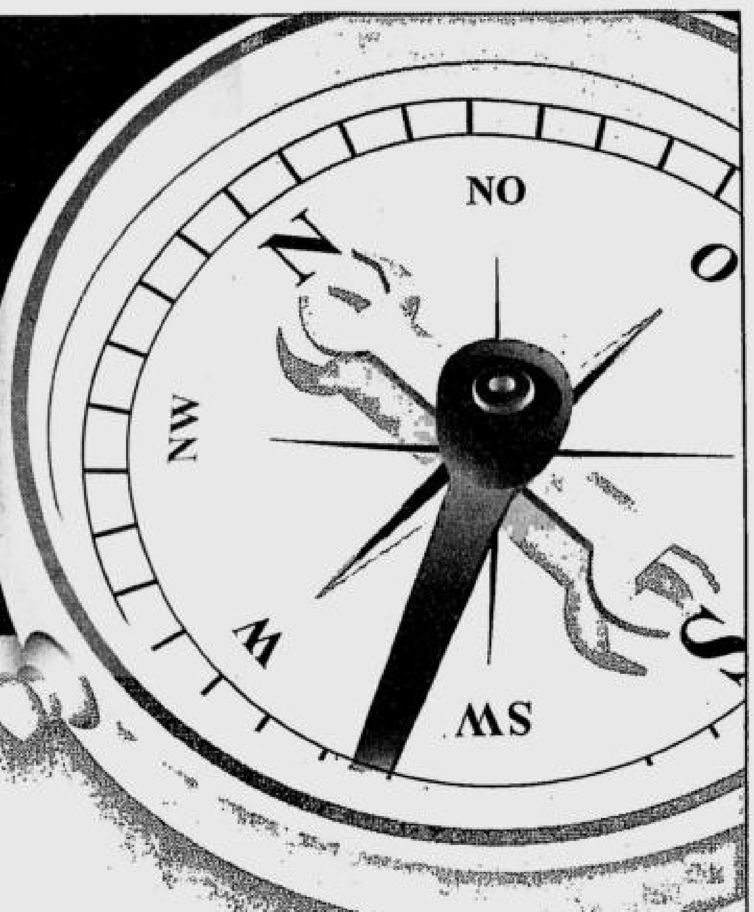

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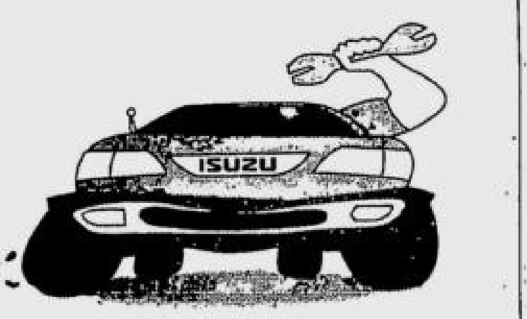

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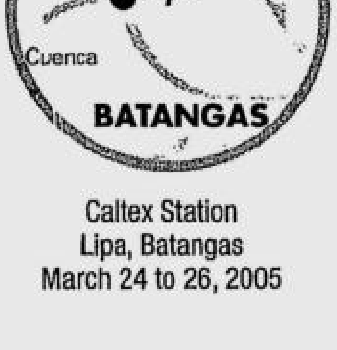

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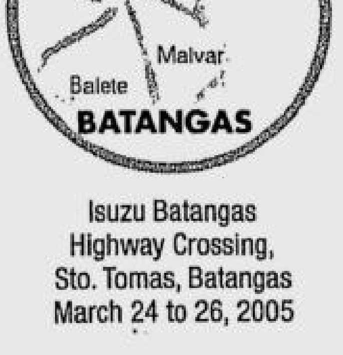

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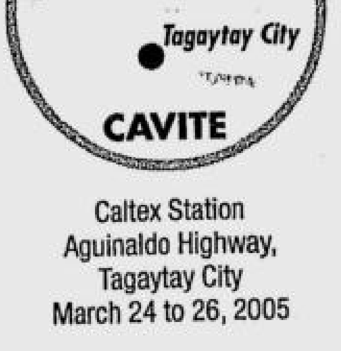

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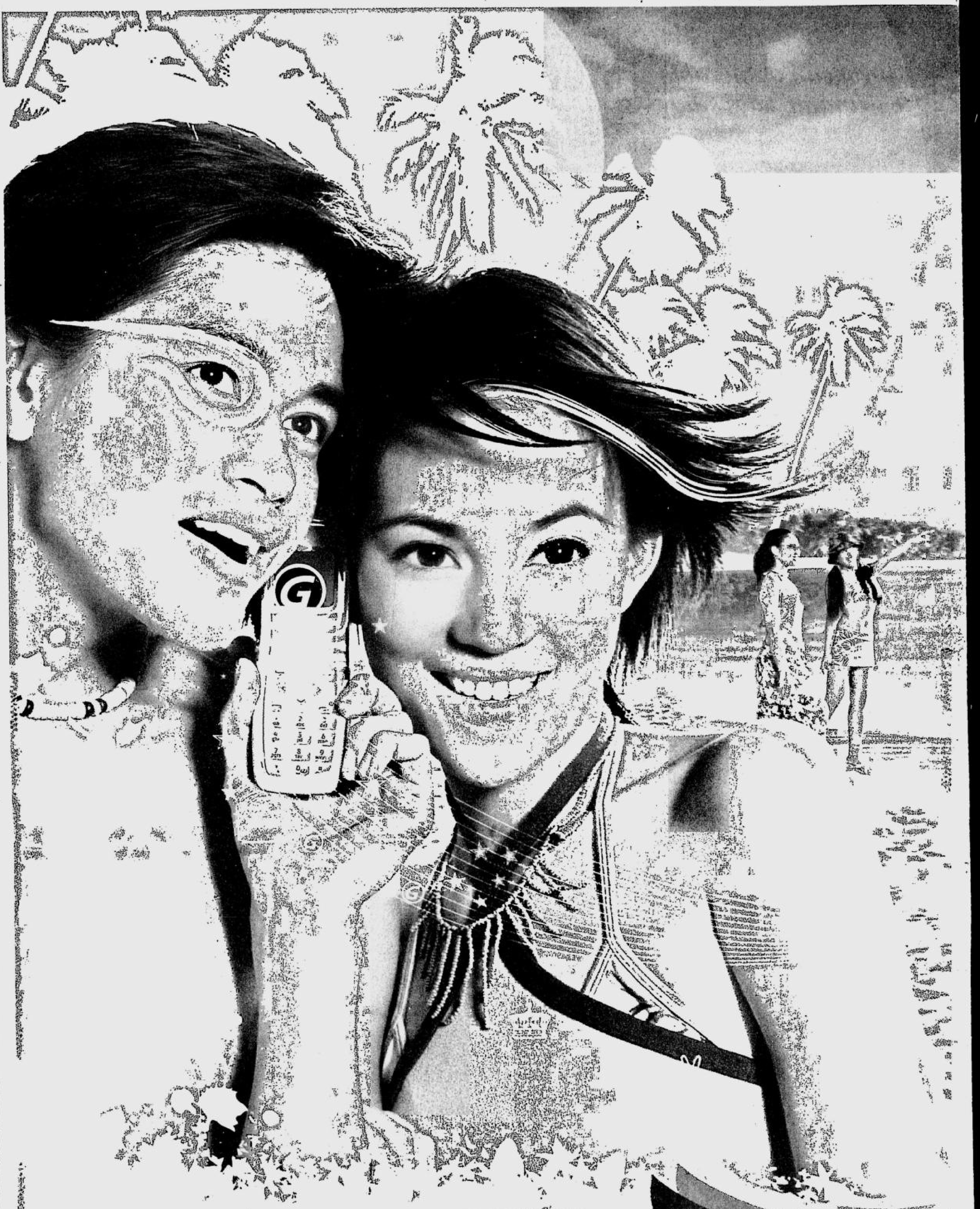

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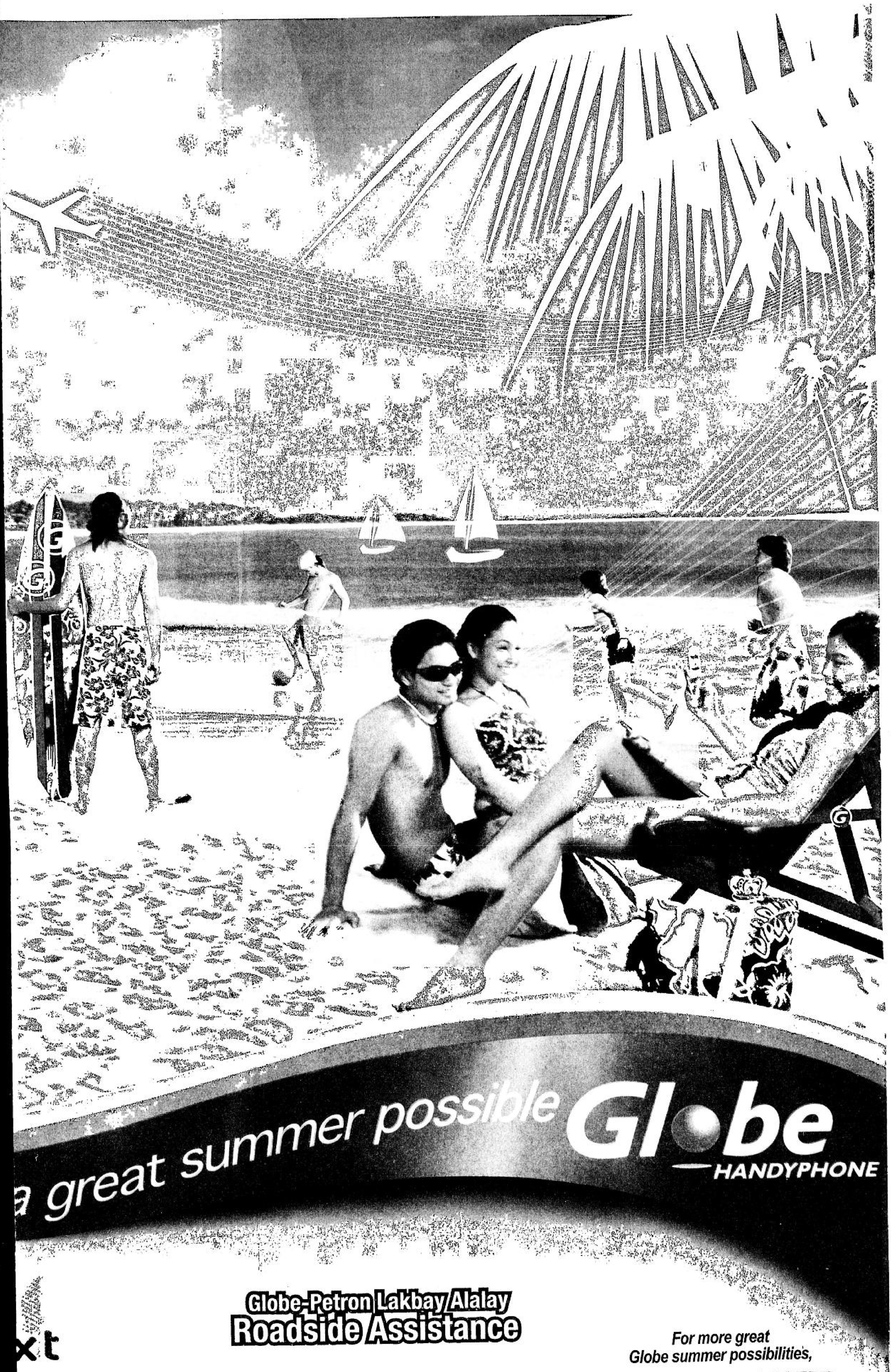

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EDITORIALS

Vigilance

JUSTICE Secretary Raul Gonzalez was being true to character when he blithely told media that a potential terrorist threat to Baguio had been "mentioned" during a Cabinet meeting while saying in the same breath he hoped this didn't lead to assumptions of the government being "paranoid." Philippine National Police Director General Arturo Lomibao tried to be more specific, saying on national radio: "This morning, we would like to say that we have confirmed the revelation of Boy Negro…Upon interrogation, he said four or five Abu Sayyaf members and one Indonesian JI have been sent to Metro Manila in the past few days." Lomibao explained that Gamal Baharan (alias "Boy Negro") confessed to the police that at least five Abu Sayyaf members had been given the mission to plant explosives in shopping malls in Metro Manila. "Their plan is to conduct bombings in Metro Manila...Their target is to put (explosives) in the dry goods section, like clothes, which would easily burn."

State prosecutor Philip Medalle chimed in by saying a person knowledgeable about the Abu Sayyaf's operations advised him to be careful when going to (Catholic) churches. "If you go to church, don't sit on the last rows or on the side of the pews. Better sit in the middle," he advised helpfully.

The statements made by Gonzalez, Lomibao and Medalle followed a similar threat issued by the spokesman of the Abu Sayyaf. According to Abu Sulayman, the Abu Sayyaf would "bring the war to Manila" in retaliation for the assault mounted by the police in Camp Bagong Diwa. And it is because of the Abu Sayyaf's own statement, perhaps, that tough questions aren't being asked of the three officials.

First of all, although every member of the press finds it most convenient that officials like Gonzalez exist, Cabinet members leaking like sieves is not conducive to forming a calm and sober picture of the security situation. Lomibao, too, failed to explain just how the alleged confession was extracted during "tactical interrogation," since it is public knowledge that such interrogations have involved torture in the past, and confessions extracted from beatings can be unreliable since they tend to reveal what the interrogators want to hear. Finally, Medalle may be trying to help, but are anonymous phone calls giving such specific information really meant to be passed on to the general public?

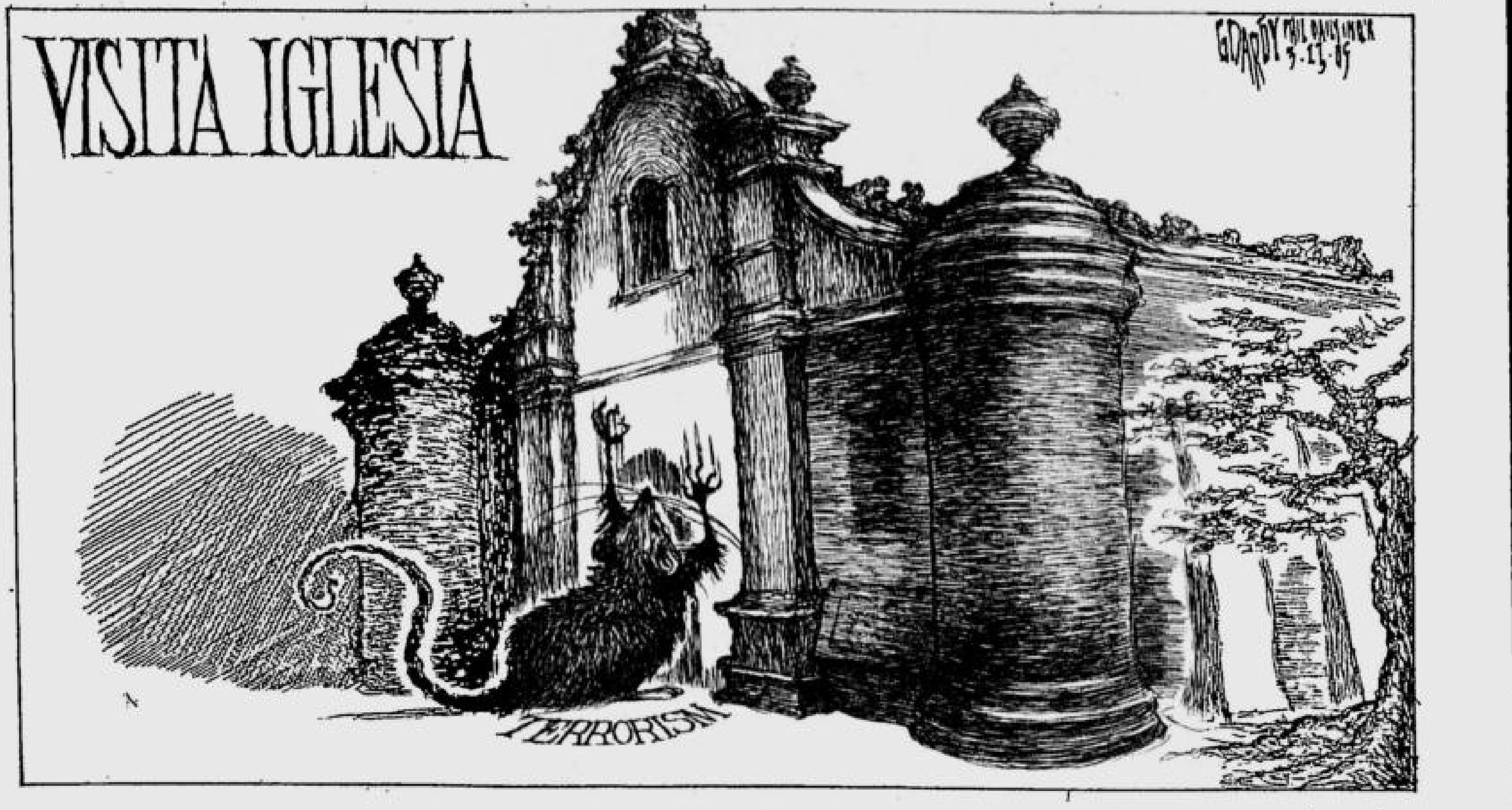
Whether the Abu Sayyaf hopes to sow terror during the Holy Week by bombing Catholic churches or shopping malls, it's clear that the times call for heightened vigilance among the populace. The PNP has achieved solid and credible gains in arresting terror suspects in the past, through the help of civic-minded individuals. It's been joked about that Filipinos are such notorious gossips and so terribly inquisitive, that they serve as an early-warning system for the police. What is true is that concerned neighborhoods are the bulwark of public safety, and that local communities can have a big hand in securing their own safety. Not only from terrorists, but from the bad habits of our military and police.

There are thousands of policemen on the front line, so to speak, during Holy Week. They deserve the full support of the public. We cannot leave things in their hands, however. Every person who decides to travel can help make the job of the police easier by being patient when long lines form, and by doing what they can to facilitate inspection. Keeping a sharp eye out for anything that may be amiss doesn't mean panic needs to set in when something appears troublesome. Remember, sowing fear in people's hearts is the primary objective of all terrorists.

Victimized

IT'S unfair, of course, to criticize Manny Pacquiao for hitting the blackjack tables in Las Vegas, but in case anyone wants to do so, remember he was only following the example of government leaders. Millions of Filipinos were content to endure the miserable coverage of his fight on their TV sets, but apparently for our congressmen, television isn't exciting enough. At a time of soaring deficits, a spectacular number of congressmen trekked to Las Vegas to watch Manny Pacquiao in person.

One congressman went as far as to justify his junket, saying it was merely a pit stop on the way to "consulting" with Filipinos overseas. One or two congressmen might have gotten away with such an excuse, but as there were nearly enough congressmen in Las Vegas to constitute a quorum in the House of Representatives, the justification fails to convince.



Manny Pacquiao has nothing to be ashamed of

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

THIS may sound like heresy to diehard Manny Pacquiao fans, but Erik Morales won that fight fair and square. Manny may have the speed and power, but Morales is the better boxer. It was like a bullfight, pitting a fast, furious and powerful bull against a skillful matador. Morales had the experience, guile, good tactics, effective defense. Manny didn't land a solid punch on him. Even if Manny didn't get that cut from an accidental head butt, he would have had a difficult time turning the tables on Morales.

But although he lost, Manny need not be ashamed of anything. He put up a good fight. He has a fighting heart. As the ring announcer said repeatedly, he is a warrior. He lost only by a very slim margin, 2 points, 115-113. With a little luck, it could have gone the other way.

What Team Pacquiao won was the propaganda war. Manny's handlers were better propagandists than fight tacticians. The hype was so much that when Manny lost, the shock and disappointment were much more. Manny and his handlers may have believed their own propaganda and became over-confident. But boxing bouts are not won by propaganda but by the fists of the boxers.

Nevertheless, the Morales-Pacquiao bout was a good fight. It will be one of the classics that will be watched again and again. There should be a return match. That would draw even a bigger crowd.

* * *

I received a quick reply from councilor Ariel E. Inton, majority leader of the Quezon City Council, to our column last Friday on the ordinance raising real estate taxes in Quezon City.

The column cited four reasons why raising taxes in Quezon City at this time is not justified:

1. The city does not need the extra money as it is the richest city in the country with a P5.8 billion income last year.

2. With the prices of everything going up, this is the worst time to raise taxes. Government should be the first to help the people cope with diminishing incomes, not add to the people's burden.

3. The taxes homeowners and businessmen pay are not spent to help them against squatters. On the contrary, the money is spent to coddle squatters who steal their property and don't pay taxes.

4. Although the Local Government Code puts the maximum realty tax at 20 percent, that is not mandatory. That is the limit precisely to prevent local government units from abusing their taxing powers. Local officials are expected to use their common sense.

But Inton has his own reason for raising taxes. "It is not true," he wrote, "that the City Council did not conduct proper hearings on the proposed increases. The council conducted a series of hearings for which notices were issued and private sector representatives were invited. The hearings were well-attended and the opinions of the private sector representatives were heard and recorded.

"They were allowed sufficient time to submit their position papers. It was precisely after the public hearings that the City Council approved an increase of only 3 percent for real estate property and only 5 percent instead of 10 for commercial and industrial areas.

"While almost all the cities of Metro Manila have imposed the maximum tax rates of 20 percent for residential and 50 percent for commercial and industrial real estate properties, it is only this time that Quezon City is increasing the rates which will take effect only next year. Marikina City imposed the maximum rates as early as 1994, San Juan in 1997, and Manila last year.

"Even if Quezon City imposes the allowable maximum rates, it will still be collecting the lowest real estate taxes compared to other cities in the National Capital Region mainly because it has one of the lowest market value assessments in real estate properties. The last general revision of tax rates for real estate properties was conducted in 1996. Yet, under the Local Government Code, this general revision is to be conducted every three years.

"This means that in Quezon City, the market value of real estate properties has not been revised and adjusted since 1996 or for the past nine years.

"Quezon City has to impose a modest increase in tax rates to meet its increasing budgetary requirements. If the income of Quezon City remains the same in the next three years, the city treasury would again be in the red, something Mayor Belmonte wants to avoid or prevent. Remember that in 2001, when he first assumed office, the city treasury had a cash deficit of over P10 million, outstanding debts and loans amounting to over P2.5 billion and a budget deficit of nearly P1 billion.

"For the last three years, Quezon City has been enjoying a surplus budget. But its income will not increase; it will reach a plateau in two years and may have to experience another budget deficit thereafter.

"Private roads, under the law, are taxable. Whenever turned over to the city, they become tax free. Many subdivisions now want to turn over their private roads to the city as they see numerous city streets long neglected now being improved and concreted.

"Mayor Belmonte has always attended to the concerns and needs of both subdivision owners and the informal settlers. His office, particularly on Mondays, is always open to callers. He has never been absent, even once, on any Monday which is known in Quezon City as Peoples' Day."

* * *

TODAY'S JOKE: Manny Pacquiao's fans are grumbling that their idol lost because there were too many congressmen during the fight at Las Vegas. They said while fans were cheering him "Manny, Manny, Manny!" the congressmen were shouting "Money, Money, Money!"

Champion

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

FIRST off, it's a lesson for local TV. Next time it covers a blockbuster sports event, it has to do it in real time. The days when networks can be a little avaricious and air those things "on a slightly delayed basis" to crowd in commercials are over. Well before the Pacquiao-Morales fight was shown on Solar TV, the result was already known and talked about in Metro Manila.

I remember that in the 1970s and 1980s, only people in media knew the result in advance. The messengers in the office where I worked were among those who milled around the teletype, waiting for word about the result of a fight, with the intention of rushing off to some part of Greater Manila, as it was called then, and betting on a sure thing. Without fear of being caught cheating and roughed up.

Today, there are all sorts of media reporting events instantaneously. Radio was already broadcasting the result of the Pacquiao-Morales fight shortly after it started on TV. I had resolved to resist the temptation to look at the Internet and at my cell phone messages, the latter being where in the past I learned, to my chagrin, the ending of a fight just as it was beginning on TV, but I let one slip away. I saw a friend's name on my cell just past noon, and imagining he might have an urgent thing to say, read his message. Only to learn of Pacquiao's defeat. I felt defeated.

I was, of course, one of those who mourned his loss. Though while at that, I did not greatly envy him his monumental burdens from the start. It wasn't just his reputation and title at stake in that fight, it was the life and happiness of his country. The country had been pummeled by adversity, natural and woman-made, and needed a win badly to feel good about itself, or indeed have something to cheer about. Well, only Mike Arroyo and a slew of congressmen were there to inspire him. Better if they had sent Ynez Veneracion instead.

While at that, someone sent me this text message after the fight, jokingly quoting GMA: "My countrymen, the need to impose new taxes has now become more urgent. *Naubos ang* CDF *ng ating mga* congressmen *sa pustahan sa Las Vegas* (Our congressmen lost their CDF betting in Las Vegas). We may now have to borrow from Mexico." That is the kind of joke that could make you die laughing.

Like most Filipinos, I expected a dazzling victory and dancing in the streets. My cable TV turned snowy early last week, a development I didn't particularly greatly mind (I use TV pretty much to watch DVD), until I remembered that Pacquaio was fighting last Sunday. I frantically called up SkyCable Friday, and they assured me they'd fix it in 24-48 hours. Friday came and went, and I called them again. The repairmen came Saturday afternoon and were friendly enough. They laughed when I told them the reason why I badly needed the cable fixed, and one said he himself wasn't watching the fight, he was afraid Pacquiao might lose. I told him not to worry: if Pacquiao's showing last December was any indication, he would flatten out Morales in no time. Morales had lost to Barrera, and Barrera had lost to Pacquiao, in a complete rout. Not to worry, I repeated, Pacquiao would take out Morales.

Alas, as it turned out, boxing is not Algebra. In Algebra, if A is greater than B and B is greater than C, then A is greater than C. In boxing, C can always be greater than A. Morales certainly was so, dominating Pacquiao pretty much the way Pacquiao dominated Barrera. Much would be made of the fact that Pacquiao suffered a cut midway into the fight, but he was already losing the fight to the more savvy Morales even then. The same way he did—though it was ruled a draw—to Marquez last year, Marquez clawing out of three knockdowns in the first round and reclaiming the rest of the fight with superior skills.

I still think Pacquiao could have made up, and will make up in future, for rawness with quickness and power. But he has to regain something he has lost tremendously in a couple of years, and that is the fire in his eyes. That was the one thing I saw in his fight with Barrera, and even with Marquez in the first few rounds, which wasn't there with Morales. A fire born of hunger, a fire sparked by desire, a fire fanned by an obsession to excel. It just wasn't there last Sunday, even before a head butt virtually closed his right eye.

I'm glad at least that public officials have commiserated with him, including GMA, who said, "I praise Manny Pacquiao's courage, ability, and fighting spirit." Though I suspect the prepared speech for when he won was far more effusive. If I recall, the President preempted the showing of the post-fight analysis of the Pacquiao-Barrera fight by going on air to congratulate Pacquiao. But like I said, I'm glad at least for the commiseration, including Dick Gordon's "(This will) make (Pacquiao) a better fighter and a better champion in the future. There's nothing to be ashamed of." It has nothing to do with Erap's or Robin Padilla's idea of "*walang iwanan*," it's just basic decency.

A fighter's mettle is not shown in victory, it is shown in defeat. Or indeed, as Muhammad Ali proved, it isn't shown entirely, or even largely, in the ring. It is shown outside of it, in life. Ali's greatest defeat wasn't in the ring and wasn't caused by any of his pugilistic archenemies. It was caused by the US government which stripped him of his title and his license to fight because he refused the draft. As it turned out, that was his greatest victory, too. I don't know that Pacquiao will ever have occasion to fight a fight like that. I do know that the way he comports himself after this defeat will decide whether he will go the path of Muhammad Ali or Rolando Navarette.

Character. In the end, that's the stuff that makes for true champions.

A conflict of cultures

ANALYSIS

Amando Doronila

PUBLIC business grinds to a halt by mid-day today, clearing the way for the long Easter holidays during which nothing gets done until next Monday. Congress began its Easter break on March 18, and for the executive department, the traditional recess marked the commencement of its mortification because Congress failed to pass a key revenue legislation: the value-added tax (VAT) reforms.

President Macapagal-Arroyo has pushed for the approval of the VAT bill which seeks to increase the VAT rate from 10 percent to 12 percent, and to lift VAT exemptions on power and petroleum sales and the services of professionals like doctors.

The VAT reforms are expected to generate up to P65 billion in new revenues to significantly reduce the fiscal deficit and to finance the administration's socio-economic projects.

The failure of the passage of the VAT bill highlighted a three-way impasse between the executive and legislative departments as well as the stand-off between the House of Representatives and the Senate, each of which stubbornly held to its version of the bill. The President has asked Congress to increase the VAT rate to 12 percent from the current 10 percent. The Senate has rejected her proposal, insisting on fixing the rate at 10 percent while lifting certain exemptions and increasing corporate income tax to 35 percent from 32 percent. Not content to play second fiddle to anyone, the House approved two bills increasing the rate to 12 percent and imposing multi-tiered versions.

The failure of the bill to hurdle the March 17 deadline left the administration in an apocalyptic mood and prompted the President to issue warnings that every week of delay in the VAT reforms is costing the government P1.25 billion in expected revenue. "We cannot hope to build a strong energy sector if it is built on a foundation of quicksand, and which is precisely what will happen if we do not get the VAT soon," she said.

In an effort to make up for lost time, the President last week called Congress to a special session from March 30 to April 1. There were doubts whether, first, there would be a quorum for the special session, and, second, whether the gridlock could be broken in three days of session. Against these grim prospects, the President decided nevertheless to call the session.

Five senators now traveling overseas will be unable to attend the special session, and eight senators, both from the administration and from the opposition, have confirmed their attendance, but the question of a quorum does not seem that critical. The more important question is whether the senators are in the mood to break the impasse, and work day and night for three days to reconcile contentious portions of the bill.

The President and a number of senators, including administration allies, do not share the same sense of urgency of passing the bill in a special session. Some senators believe it can wait for the resumption of the regular session in April.

Senate Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan thinks that it would be unwise for the President to press for the passage of the bill at the cost of abbreviating debate. "Some senators need more time to debate the matter," he said. "They see no problem in passing the VAT mid-April...Haste makes waste."

Even Senate President Franklin Drilon does not seem confident the special session can break the impasse. "It is possible that we will not approve it," he said. "It is possible that it will be approved."

With such display of weak conviction, it is clear the Senate leadership, as well as the opposition members, do not share the same priorities with the President in regard to the timetable for the completion of key revenue reform measures.

The President and her financial managers maintain that time is critical in battling the deficit and turning the economy around. Congress does not have the same sense of urgency as the President in passing even her already short-listed urgent revenue reform package.

The fact that the President has the numbers in both Houses of Congress has not translated into an effective coalition that can be galvanized to push even the core reform programs of the administration, such as the eight revenue measures.

The administration's majority in Congress is a token majority. The gridlock in Congress is no longer an issue of conflict between the administration's allies and the opposition. The impasse over the VAT bill highlights the clash of contending mentalities and culture between the administration and members of Congress.

Driven by a reformist goal, the administration is motivated by the desire to get things done. To the administration, time is of the essence. Congress is driven by the conviction that its vital function is to scrutinize closely administration proposals, no matter the delay. For members of Congress, their important function in a democracy is to provide check and balance to the executive, even if this results in gridlock.

The fiscal crisis has put the administration under pressure to push hard for reforms which are likely to be unpopular because they entail costs and sacrifices. Under this deficit crisis, the conflict of the culture seeking to deliver quick results and the parliamentary culture that makes a virtue of time-consuming parliamentary scrutiny of executive proposals has become more pronounced than before with the deadlock on the tax measures.

This recurrent gridlock between the executive and the legislative has raised serious concerns over whether a democracy built on this form of conflict can deliver results at all. In a fiscal deficit crisis, delays resulting from gridlock can lead to a dysfunctional democracy and economic paralysis.

The $1-trillion gap and Asia's opportunity

COMMENTARY

Geert van der Linden,
Seiichi Nakamura,
and Jemal-ud-din Kassum

FOR many years, the yawning gap in East Asia's infrastructure has been seen as a serious risk, a likely impediment to growth. And in a very real sense, it is. The region needs to invest $1 trillion over the next five years in roads, communications, water and power, and other basic necessities, just to cope with the rapid pace of urbanization, the increased demands of the private sector, and the expanding population.

Without this investment, the region will lose the growing opportunity. The resulting slower growth would mean fewer jobs, less spending and investment, and fewer opportunities for creating wealth and reducing poverty. Unless the investment is made wisely, the region will suffer as well, through wider income disparities, failing cities (which will have an extra 500 million people living in them in 2025) and reduced social stability. So those who worry about the consequences of an unfilled infrastructure gap are right; we should all be concerned.

But there is another dimension to the issue, a positive one often overshadowed by the scale of the needs. In the eight years since the financial crisis swept Asia, sending currencies and economies into free fall, East Asia has grown and developed in important ways. The East Asian nations have more open governments, which allow more vigorous debate on major policy and fiscal expenditure issues. They have stronger institutions, capable of handling large transactions and investments more efficiently. They are less vulnerable to sudden financial shocks, less exposed to speculative attacks or to the spread of recession from one economy to another. And while it is hard to say that there is less corruption, there is less tolerance of it and fewer illusions about its hidden costs on business and on the poor.

In a major study undertaken over the past year, the Asian Development Bank, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the World Bank have concluded that East Asia's ability to respond to the challenges of the infrastructure gap will depend heavily on these "post-crisis" attributes. But more than this, our report concludes that in tackling the infrastructure needs of the region, countries of East Asia are likely to further strengthen their ability to manage the transition to more decentralized governments and more participatory processes. If this does in fact happen—and there is good reason to believe it will—it will make the countries of the region even better able to manage the planning, financing and implementing of complex projects in the future. It will not just be roads and bridges that are built, but better societies.

The region has the need, the ability and the opportunity to close the infrastructure gap and lay the basis for sustained growth for the coming generation. If it is to take advantage of this opportunity, success will depend heavily on having efficient planning and implementing agencies, as well as competent financial markets.

Further, elected officials and public servants will have to learn how to work efficiently in a world where central government has given away a great deal of power to local administrations, sometimes leaving a critical administrative vacuum. Somehow, the big and small, national and local levels of government will need to coordinate their activities and work together, or both will be worse off.

In a survey of 48 companies from outside and inside the region, investors told us they will come back to East Asian developing countries, provided they have predictable policies and consistent regulations. Joint public-private partnerships and risk mitigation measures will also pave the way for new investment, but the private sector cannot do it alone.

Where companies cannot or will not step in, governments should. This will mean, in some cases, governments providing subsidies or capital to infrastructure providers, whether they be supplying water or opening roads. As long as this assistance is done as a last resort, and in a transparent and temporary way, it can be a vital catalyst for much-needed investments. Governments should also maintain their efforts to strengthen local capital markets and pay close attention to policies that affect the investment climate.

As the infrastructure is built, countries should aim to create competitive environments rather than monopolies. Competition, together with competent regulators, will do much to make infrastructure providers more accountable to the public and more responsive to the market.

Infrastructure has also sometimes been associated with corruption, environmental damage and waste. It need not be the case, and should not be, if East Asia draws on lessons from the recent past. Experience shows that more open competition, more transparent disclosure and more rigorous monitoring have a powerful sanitizing effect on the behavior of public officials and major service providers.

Across East Asia, pressure is building for countries to be more open and integrated, and for the poorer to close the gap with their richer neighbors. Some infrastructure will be able to open new markets (as in improved roads and ports) or serve secondary markets (as in provision of power or water to another country). These projects, which can generate closer ties and money, are to be encouraged. A more stable, integrated and prosperous East Asia will benefit the millions of poor people. The irony, of course, is that more growth and success will also increase the demand for more infrastructure.

Geert van der Linden is vice president of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Seiichi Nakamura is director general of JBIC Institute, and Jemal-ud-din Kassum is the regional vice president of the World Bank.

Holy Week beliefs

LOOKING BACK

Ambeth R. Ocampo

WITH THE THREAT of terrorism looming in the background, I was told that our parish cancelled the traditional Holy Week procession and Easter Sunday *salubong*. We have been warned that the Abu Sayyaf plans to bomb churches this week in retaliation for the killing of their cohorts who tried to escape from prison. Most people I have talked to ask aloud why the terrorists would pick on churches when there are other targets to choose from.

Holy Week is not the time for vengeance, but some hotheads suggest that if churches are bombed this week, maybe the same thing should be done to mosques during Ramadan. Unfortunately, the picture is oversimplified into a holy war, and in the process we forget that the Abu Sayyaf are plain bandits with no political or religious issues to promote.

Holy Week has indeed changed from what I knew as a child in the days before cable TV and malls. In those Jurassic days, you could not watch anything even slightly entertaining on TV, except re-runs of Fr. Patrick Peyton's "Holy Rosary Crusade" which seemed to have been filmed originally in Spanish and dubbed in English because the mouths did not quite coordinate with the speech. Most memorable is that Christ's face was never shown and all the viewers had to guide them into prayer was the back of his head with long black hair with curled ends—obviously a cheap wig.

Movie houses took the opportunity to re-run Cecil B. DeMille's classic "Ten Commandments," whose special effects will make viewers today yawn or, much worse, laugh. (One wonders if we will have reruns of Gibson's bloody "Passion" movie.) With all business establishments closed, there was very little diversion available and people could go home or bond with each other on the beach.

Frankly, it was not till I lived in a monastery that I realized how rich Catholic liturgy can be. When I was a child, Holy Week was spent on a beach, or playing with my cousins in Pampanga. We would attend a Wednesday procession in my father's hometown, watch flagellants in San Fernando and hear the wailing of *Pasyon* everywhere.

This year, Instituto Cervantes in Manila has taken on the *Pasyon* tradition and will have a marathon oral reading of the entire Don Quixote over a number of days to commemorate a Cervantes anniversary. Perhaps a marathon reading of the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation can be attempted, though I wonder if one week would be long enough.

With the change in Holy Week habits, there are many beliefs that are also beginning to change or be extinct. For example, we were told not to bathe on Good Friday. I didn't know what this was all about. When I asked for a reason, the reply was like a Zen koan: *"Patay ang tubig."* How can water be dead? We were not allowed to go to the beach or even play at 3 p.m. on Good Friday in commemoration, I guess, of Christ's death.

That, along with fasting and abstinence, was what was most memorable about Holy Week in my childhood. So when I was going over Fr. Francisco Demetrio's two-volume "Dictionary of Folk Beliefs and Customs," it reminded me of Holy Week in the past.

It was believed that accidents usually happened in Holy Week. Frankly, it had nothing to do with the season. It was just that you had an unusually big number of travelers and people returning to hometowns so accidents happened. These days on the expressways, we have rest stops and gas stations. In the North Luzon Expressway, you actually have swift assistance from tollways police who provide a phone or water for an overheated car.

There was also a belief that if an animal or insect bit you during Holy Week that bite was poisonous. The rest of the year these bites were harmless.

You were also warned to be extra careful because if you were wounded during Holy Week, the wound would take longer to heal. We were told the exact opposite about flagellants who were all bloodied, because they cut their backs with razor blades or especially-made paddles with spikes, and when they were finished with their penitential rite, they bathed in the river and everything healed quickly.

Fashion also changed during Holy Week, because there was a taboo on wearing red on Good Friday, but nobody seemed to mind the Nazareno of Quiapo and his devotees who did wear red.

Roasting food on Good Friday was said to cause freckles or, even worse, turn the face soot black.

Other things you shouldn't do on Good Friday were: sweeping, spending, over-eating, laughing, traveling, working, walking about, using sharp objects, etc.—the list was quite long.

Most interesting is the underside to folk customs that state that magicians, witches, shamans and similar types recharge their powers during this time. Amulets or *anting-anting* are also created or recharged during Holy Week.

The catalogue of Holy Week beliefs, as recorded by Demetrio, makes for interesting reading today because many urban people have outgrown them. There must be a logical or anthropological reason for all these beliefs and practices, and one can only hope that current practices are compiled by researchers so that we can compare and contrast our present Holy Week beliefs and customs with the past.

* * *

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu

Magdalena

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

WHEN we think of Jesus' disciples and close followers, we think of men, of the Last Supper with Jesus and his 12 apostles (including a sinister-looking Judas).

Church fathers yes, but who would be the Church mothers?

A recent CNN documentary starts out with an intriguing invitation to rethink early Christianity: "One is revered as the mother of Jesus, the other as the prostitute Jesus saves. They are the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, the founding mothers of Christianity."

Catholics and Protestants are now revisiting the role of the Virgin Mary, not just as a woman to be venerated because she was Jesus' mother but as someone to emulate for her courage and her faith. But to have Mary Magdalene sharing the main honors with the Virgin Mary?

No solemn "Last Supper" images here; instead, Filipinos will think of Freddie Aguilar's sad song about a "fallen woman," entitled "Magdalena," or the controversial "Jesus Christ Superstar" and "The Last Temptation of Christ," both suggesting Jesus was intimate with Mary Magdalene.

Then there's the best-selling novel "The Da Vinci Code," where Jesus ends up marrying Mary Magdalene and starting a family with her. The novel has turned our current crop of Church fathers livid, so much so the Vatican has appointed no less than a cardinal to defend the Catholic Church from the novel.

Seven demons

There are many reasons the Catholic Church is upset with the novel, but I suspect their main gripe is against this idea that Jesus might have ended up marrying a former harlot.

Ironically, it was our earlier Church fathers who created this myth of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute. The CNN documentary I mentioned eventually clarifies that Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute, but I first learned about the mythmaking from a lecture of Sr. Helen Graham, a biblical scholar who teaches at the Maryhill School of Theology.

Sister Helen's lecture was about learning to read the Bible carefully. Mary Magdalene was a case in point. From the Bible we know she was one of several women who were loyal followers of Jesus, accompanying him as he preached in the villages of Judea and Galilee.

We know, too from the gospel of Luke that "seven demons had gone out of her," which has been interpreted to mean Mary Magdalene was a very sinful woman. But Sister Helen explains that this was probably a passage referring to Jesus as a healer, demons being a common metaphor at that time for illnesses, rather than to sinfulness.

The reference to Mary Magdalene's seven demons is found in Luke 8:1-3. Only a few passages earlier, in Luke 7:36-50, we find the story of a woman, explicitly described as a "sinner," who washes Jesus' feet with her tears, dries them with her hair and anoints them with ointment. The incident scandalizes people around Jesus, but he admonishes them mildly and declares the woman's sins as forgiven. We now presume this was Mary Magdalene, but as Sister Helen likes to challenge her audiences, "Show me where Mary Magdalene's name is actually mentioned." We find that, indeed, no name is given; it is only presumed that they were one and the same.

Jesus' strong women

So who was Mary Magdalene? The times when she is mentioned by name in the gospels tell us she was one of several women who served Jesus "from all her possessions." Biblical scholars say she was probably wealthy, having made money from fishing.

Mary Magdalene was clearly a leader. All four gospels mention she was at the foot of Jesus' cross. John's gospel only names women, all Marys, at Jesus' feet: his mother, his mother's sister (Mary the wife of Cleofas) and Mary Magdalene.

Where were the men? The apostles probably kept their distance since Jesus was, after all, a criminal sentenced to death for subversion. The gospels tell us that it was the women who buried Jesus, again a risk since Roman law prescribed that the crucified should be left hanging on their crosses.

Most importantly, the gospels tell us it was the women who discovered Jesus' empty tomb. Again, it is John's gospel that gives a lead role to Mary Magdalene, describing her as the one who went, alone, to Jesus' tomb first thing in the morning "while it was still dark." She weeps when she finds the empty tomb but eventually, Jesus emerges and calls out to her, "Mary!" She recognizes the voice and answers, "Rabbi!" or teacher.

Jesus then tells her: "Do not hold on to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father, your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Apostle to the apostles

We see then that the message of the Resurrection, so essential to Christianity, is first given to a woman, Mary Magdalene, who in turn proclaims the joyful news to other followers including, presumably, the cowering male apostles.

The four gospels of the New Testament don't tell us what happens to Mary Magdalene and the other women. But the "Gnostic Gospels," coming from a Christian sect that was eventually persecuted as heretical, include a "Gospel According to Mary Magdalene." This gospel was probably not written by Mary Magdalene herself but the passages are from what she preached about Jesus. So thorough is she that there is one passage where a resentful Peter asks: "Did He really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did He prefer her to us?"

The men eventually came to dominate the Christian churches and women were devalued. Pope Gregory the Great, in the 6th century, was the first to describe Mary Magdalene as a public sinner who repented. There was probably no conspiracy involved here; it was just difficult for the men to think of women as leaders. Mary Magdalene as a, well, Church mother, just didn't seem right. She had to be put in her place, and why not as a prostitute who reformed and then followed Jesus, but not on equal footing as the (male) apostles? In a way, the "two Marys" came to represent the way conservative Christians want to depict women: either as Madonnas (as with the Virgin Mary) or as whores (as with Mary Magdalene).

Fortunately, there is now renewed interest in rediscovering Mary Magdalene. I can't help but wonder though if our gender biases are still at work here, with almost wistful thinking, as expressed in "The Da Vinci Code," to have her as Christ's wife.

Prof. Karen King of the Harvard Divinity School, interviewed for the CNN documentary, observes that if this had happened, there would have been some reference to her, in the gospels or other early Christian writings, as "Mary, wife of Jesus." Instead, what we find are several references in the gospels to Mary Magdalene as among Jesus' closest disciples. Why shouldn't we honor Mary Magdalene that way, as a woman in her own right, an early Christian leader who proclaimed Jesus' resurrection and went on to become, as St. Augustine calls her, "an apostle to the apostles?"

LETTERS

Competitiveness at the expense of justice?

THE "OPEN Letter from the Board of Trustees of International School Manila" (PDI, 3/6/05) floats inaccuracies even as it claims to set the record straight:

1. When the ISAE (International School Alliance of Educators) filed its petition in the Supreme Court in 1996, inequity was not the norm. International schools in the region, such as IS Bangkok, Hong Kong IS, IS Kuala Lumpur, and IS Singapore, were paying on the principle of "Equal Work, Equal Pay" regardless of point of hire or nationality. IS Manila had the dubious honor of being the only International school in the region with discriminatory compensation policies that prejudiced Filipino teachers.

2. The union has no "fresh suit" as claimed by lawyer Arthur Medel; it only continuously presses for the full execution of the SC's June 2000 decision, which became final and executory in December 2000.

When Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas was about to execute the SC order in February 2002, IS Manila surprisingly obtained a TRO from the Court of Appeals. The school even managed to get a CA decision "overturning" the SC decision. In a July resolution, the SC cited this as "forum shopping."

3. Medel puts the union's claim at $18 million; computed on the basis of the judgment, it is only $7 million.

4. The board and the school superintendent say that they can indefinitely delay the implementation of the SC decision. In July 2002, the SC categorically said that the economic provisions granted "shall retroact to 1 July 1995 until 30 June 1998."

In another move, the school filed a suit before the CA questioning the application of the SC decision to the 1998-2001 collective bargaining agreement; IS Manila claims that the SC award is prejudicial to the financial viability of IS Manila, but the CA has ruled that the 100 percent parity on wages must also apply to the 1998-2001 CBA.

It is disturbing that IS Manila questions the SC decision favoring the principle of "Equal Work, Equal Pay," going as far as to suggest that the decision is tainted because "various chambers of commerce," are concerned "over the long-term impact of this decision." It insinuates that the standard set by the SC for equal treatment of Filipinos in their own country is detrimental to the "future competitiveness of the country as a location for overseas investment." Is this telling the SC how to render decisions to better serve foreign interests on Philippine soil, with little or no regard for the very people it should protect?

It's been 10 years. How many more hoops does justice need to hurdle? This is about respect for SC decisions; about justice and the rule of law; it is now about foreigners influencing Philippine courts and affecting the balance of Philippine democracy.

—RAQUEL DAVID CHING,
president,
International School Alliance of Educators (ISAE), International School Manila,
University Parkway,
Fort Bonifacio,
1634 Taguig City

Provocative words

WHEN the INQUIRER reporter asked me to comment on the events of February 1986, I declined because I saw no reason to dwell on my bitter disappointment over what eventually turned out after Edsa. I almost regret participating in that event because it did not improve the lot of our people.

But to draw me out, the reporter resorted to a journalistic method practitioners vulgarly call "*sinalsal*"—meaning, to write something about nothing. Your reporter carefully selected words and phrases to provoke a response from me: assassin, presidential scholar, favorite, killing the person he was sworn to protect.

I categorically deny all these allegations. No assassination was planned; I was never a presidential scholar much less a favorite. I will not expand on this basic denial because that would give the reporter satisfaction. This is a response to the INQUIRER's Feb. 25 article "Colonel still not talking on plot to kill Imelda."

—COL. RICARDO MORALES 402Bde,
Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur

THE ARTICLE was a recollection of the 1986 Edsa revolt, and how it affected the lives of Filipinos, military and civilian alike. The words assassination, presidential scholar, favorite, etc. were the same words then published about the plot that Ferdinand Marcos claimed he had uncovered on Feb. 22, 1986. These were definitely not used to disparage the honor of Army Col. Ricardo Morales.

—FE ZAMORA,
PDI reporter

Not incumbent LLDA chief

THIS refers to the Feb. 23 editorial of the INQUIRER on the government's war against graft and corruption, and we quote:

"Aside from the high officials mentioned, the list of the accused includes ... an assistant secretary of the Department of Transportation and Communication; the chief of special investigation division of the Bureau of Internal Revenue; the general manager of the Laguna Lake Development Authority; ..."

It concerns us that the above-quoted portion of the editorial might have created an impression in the public mind that the incumbent LLDA general manager is the accused.

Indeed, a former general manager of the LLDA has been accused of violating RA No. 6713 and RA No. 3019 in a case filed against him. Let the public be assured that the undersigned, who is the incumbent LLDA general manager, is not the one referred to by the editorial.

—EDGARDO C. MANDA,
general manager,
Laguna Lake Development Authority,
2/F Rizal Sports Complex Club Bldg.,
Rizal Provincial Capitol,
Shaw Boulevard, Pasig City

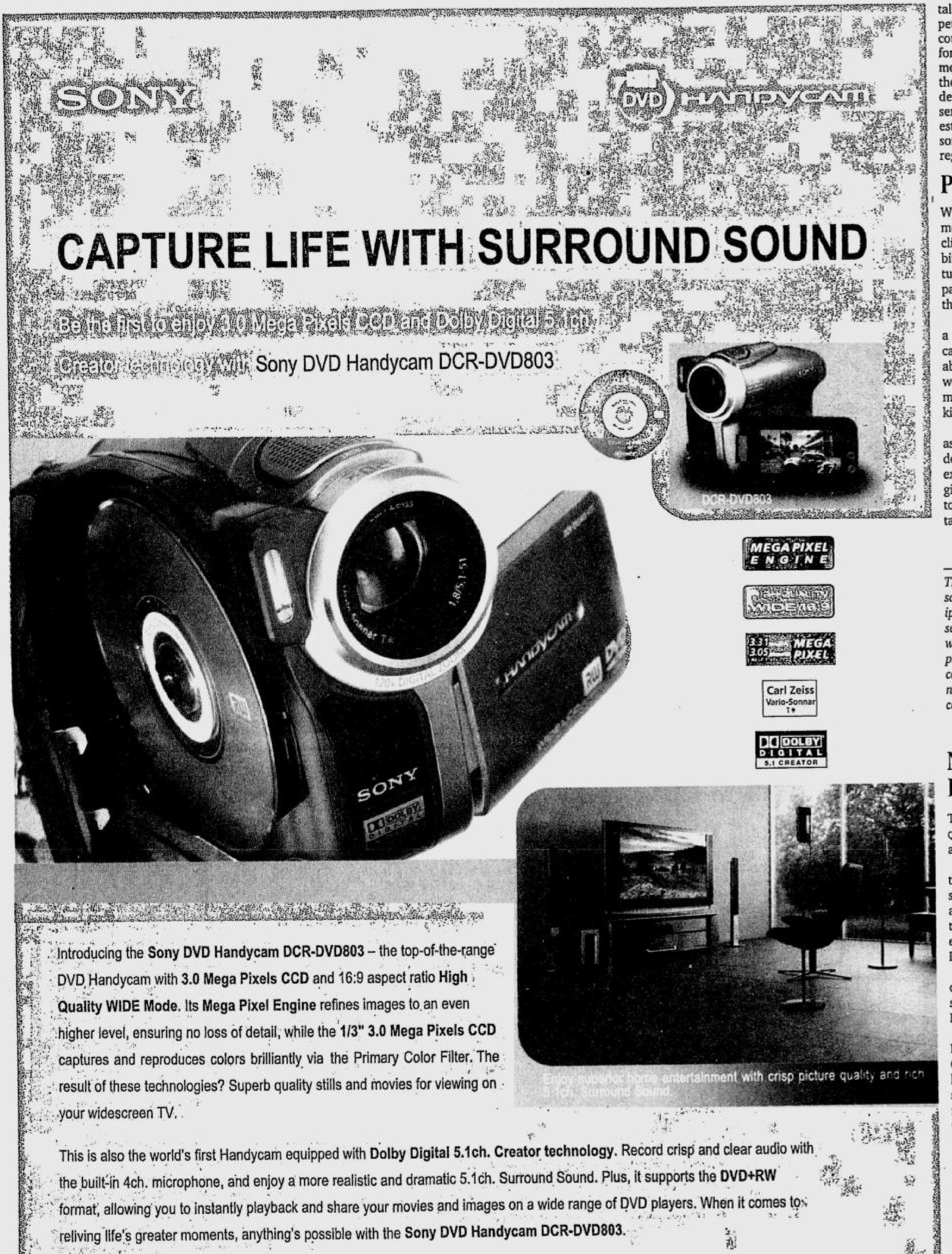
One with Bohol in grief

I JUST want to express my concern for the students who were poisoned in Bohol. It was a very sad experience for all of us, but most especially for the bereaved families. It would take a lot of time before we can fully recover from that unfortunate incident.

The 28 students who died were future leaders of our society and they could have become catalysts of change. That will not come to pass anymore. But they will always be remembered.

Life is indeed full of surprises that sometimes can make or break us. Preparing for such surprises is an internal, not an external, undertaking. Even though we are not in Bohol, our prayers would be our way of expressing our concern for the families of the victims.

—ANGELISRAEL V. HENSON,
Caritas Don Bosco School,
104 Mahogany St., Sta. Rosa Village I,
Sta. Rosa, Laguna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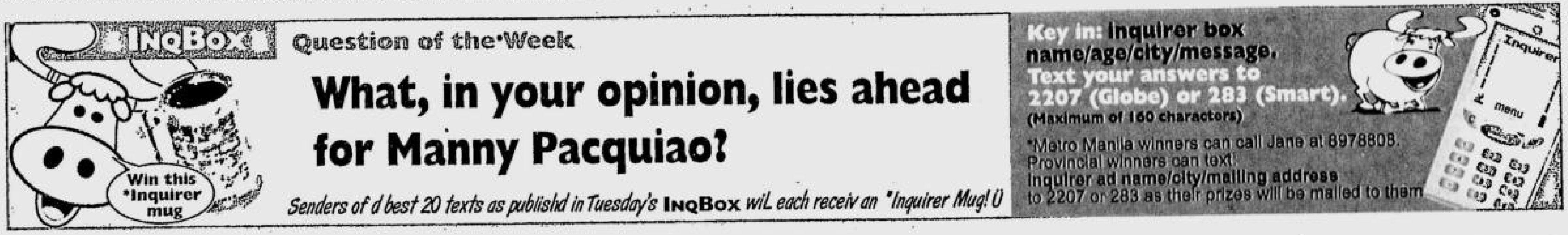

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18 Sarangani employees fired for ₱46M in unliquidated funds

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—The Ombudsman-Manila ordered the dismissal from the government service of 18 appointed and career employees at the Sarangani Provincial Capitol who were tagged as conspirators in the anomalous release of P46 million in government funds.

Fr. Fred Maghanoy, chair of the anti-corruption watchdog Sarangani People's Action for Reform and Good Governance (Spare-Go), told the INQUIRER that the accused received the Ombudsman order Friday last week.

Earlier, the Commission on Audit (COA) conducted a special audit and found out that as of Dec. 31, 2002, the provincial government has unliquidated expenses of P46.9 million.

The audit was prompted by a request from the Ombudsman for Mindanao after receiving a complaint against three provincial government employees for alleged fund anomalies.

COA, in its final audit report in September 2003, recommended the filing of criminal and administrative charges against the officials and employees involved in the anomalous releases of millions of pesos in government funds to at least 53 fake cooperatives and non-government organizations.

The National Bureau of Investigation, after conducting its own probe in the latter part of 2003, also recommended the filing of graft and falsification of public documents charges against the officials and employees involved.

Based on the COA findings, Spare-Go filed charges of grave misconduct and dishonesty against then governor Miguel Escobar, vice governor Felipe Constantino, board members Margie Rudes, Eugene Alzate, Hernando Sibugan, Redempto Abiso, Teodorico Diaz, Juanito Purisima, Pyang Singcoy, Marlind Marcelo, Jesus Desidilla and Lelibeth Canillo.

Other officials and employees tagged as conspirators were then provincial administrator Perla Maglinte, provincial accountant Maria Camanay, provincial treasurer Ceasar Cagang, provincial agriculturist Romeo Miole, executive assistant III of the Office of the Vice Governor Amelia Carmela Zoleta, Accountant IV Suzette Clerigo, Assistant Treasurer Rosario Concon, Assistant Provincial Agriculturist Patricio Sol, Management Audit Analyst III Vivencia Telesforo, Accountant III Marlene Rafael, Pre-Audit Division Head Roselyn Constantino, Fiscal Examiner II Snooky Banderado, Management Audit Analyst II Diosdada Pamplona, Mary Ann Gadian, computer operator II and Sherryl Desiree Jane Tangan, local legislative assistant I.

The Ombudsman-Mindanao issued a 60-day suspension order against the appointed and career employees but spared the elected ones.

Escobar did not implement the order but it was implemented when Gov. Miguel Rene Dominguez took over.

Maghanoy, who received a series of death threats for leading the anti-corruption movement in the province, added that the Ombudsman order dismissing those employees involved in the anomaly is a big triumph on the part of ordinary residents.

The Spare-Go official was hoping that the warrant of arrest would soon come out against the former officials. *Aquiles Zonio, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

EDWIN BACASMAS

FLIGHT
A boy takes a plunge into the waters of Lamitan, Basilan, a town besieged in the past by terrorism and conflict and which recently benefited from mercy missions from US and Filipino troops.

Plant mangroves vs tsunami, says Quezon legislator

LUCENA CITY—Still reeling from the shock of the deadly tsunami that hit Asian coasts and killed thousands of people, Quezon board member Isaias Ubana II urged the provincial government to initiate the planting of mangroves along the vast coastlines of the province to prevent the repeat of similar tragedies in Quezon.

"The planting of beach tree species along the coastlines would serve as significant mitigating measures in reducing or dissipating the strength of an incoming tsunami," Ubana said in a privilege speech during the council's regular session.

He based his apprehension on the geological condition of the province, which is bounded by several tsunami-generating structures like trenches and fault lines.

The province has one city and 40 towns, 34 of which lie along the coastlines of the Pacific Ocean, Tayabas Bay, Lamon Bay and Ragay Gulf.

Fault line

Ubana noted that on the eastern part of the province within the Lamon Bay lies the "Philippine fault line," which stretches from the northern tip of Infanta, crossing the Lamon Bay and then cutting through the towns of Calauag and Guinyangan before it stretches down to Mindanao.

Citing records from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources provincial office, Ubana said the last time the fault line made a major movement was on March 17, 1973 with a magnitude of 7 in the Richter scale.

Hardest hit were Calauag, Lopez, Tagkawayan and Guinyangan towns.

On the southwestern part of Quezon, Ubana noted that another fault line exists—the Lubang fault, which lies underneath near Tayabas Bay and off the coastlines of Aglubang Island.

The Aglubang fault, he said, last moved sometime in 1944 with a magnitude of 7.

Tsunami

He said the tsunami that followed hit about 40 km of the northern and eastern shorelines of Mindoro from Puerto Galera up to Pinamalayan.

Ubana added that on the northwestern part of Quezon are inland "fault systems."

Among the prominent structures are the Marikina valley fault system and the Digdig fault, which last moved with a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale on July 16, 1990 that caused the massive Luzon tremor.

Ubana cited the reports by various national and regional offices, including DENR-Quezon, which had concluded that most of the coastal towns in Quezon are very much susceptible to the destructive effects of tsunami.

Ubana called on the town officials to hold quarterly tsunami and earthquake preparedness drills and adopt a disaster management plan for tsunami-related incidents. *Delfin Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Deaths of 3 inmates in Cotabato City puzzle execs

COTABATO CITY—The death of three inmates here last week has continued to puzzle authorities, prompting prison official to seek religious intervention.

From March 13 to 18, the City Reformatory Center recorded the deaths of inmates Moki Sinsuat, Erwin Tanghal and Jaime Tadiles, said jail warden Senior Insp. Panga Arab.

Arab said the fatalities, all in their early 20s, died within two days of each other.

Weak, pale and gasping for breath, the victims were individually rushed to the Cotabato Regional and Medical Center where doctors diagnosed them to have suffered "high blood pressure" and died of "cardiac arrest," Arab said.

Suspicion of possible maltreatment by prison guards on the victims arose but Arab insisted "this never happened since I assumed (the jail warden post)."

Asked about the inmates' daily food intake, he said, it consists of dried fish, rice and coffee for breakfast and followed by fish and vegetables for their succeeding meals at the daily rate of P35 per prisoner.

They are well-fed and treated according to prison rules, he said.

On Sunday, he sought the help of a *pandita* (Muslim cleric) to bless the reformatory center believed to have been occupied by "supernatural beings" due to presence of a huge *balete* tree.

"The victims could have been possessed by bad spirits emanating from the *balete* tree," said Arab, quoting observations of some inmates who proposed to have the place blessed and those possessed exorcised.

He said on Holy Thursday, a Catholic priest will come over to conduct sort of "spiritual cleansing" among Christian inmates.

"It's hard to believe that in a week's time three inmates have to die of cardiac arrest," the baffled jail warden said. *Charlie Señase, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Trekkers banned in Kanlaon as Phivolcs issues warning

BACOLOD CITY—Mountain climbers and faith healers may have to skip Mt. Kanlaon this Holy Week after the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) on Monday warned that climbing to the volcano's crater might be deadly.

Ben Tanatan, acting chief of the Phivolcs Kanlaon Volcano Observatory, said the ban against trekking at the Mt. Kanlaon remains in effect over Holy Week because phreatic explosion could occur without warning.

Alert Level No. 1 has been raised over Mt. Kanlaon after the Phivolcs reported moderate emission of grayish volcanic plume on Jan. 21.

Tanatan said phreatic explosion could suddenly occur wherein the volcano would spew ash and stones that could be deadly for trekkers in the vicinity.

A phreatic explosion is a volcanic eruption, which occurs when water and heated volcanic rocks interact to produce a violent expulsion of steam and pulverized rocks.

In August 1996, a phreatic explosion in Mt. Kanlaon claimed the lives of three persons—Filipinos Noel Tragico and Neil Perez and Briton Julian Green.

Mt. Kanlaon, rising at an elevation of 2,465 meters, is the highest in Central Philippines.

It is also the favorite destination of climbers and faith healers during the Holy Week. *Carla Gomez, PDI Visayas Bureau*

Religious images owners give testimony to blessings

LEGAZPI CITY—Owners of antique life-sized religious images in Albay said having and taking good care of these icons had brought them immeasurable blessings.

Mar Arguelles, whose family of four generations has been taking care of the icon of Maria Soledad for more than 100 years now, said the image has kept the family intact through the years.

With Maria Soledad in their possession, he said, their faith in God and the family members' relationship with each other get stronger everyday.

He said that even if his family members and relatives are miles away the whole year, everybody is present during Good Friday to pay respects and honor to the image at their residence in Old Albay District here.

"No serious illness has been experienced by any member of my family. My mom died as if she was just sleeping two years ago at the age of 93," Arguelles recounted.

They start honoring Maria Soledad with Mass on Wednesday afternoon, followed by a simple social gathering with relatives and friends.

According to the Morano family of Barangay Baño here, keeping three life-sized images of the passion of the Christ—namely, Santo Intierro, Ecce Homo and Azutado—is the best thing they have ever done because God's blessings continue to pour.

Amelia Morano, 49, said that since they started taking care of the three images, they have never had hardships in life. Most of her relatives have good jobs here and in Metro Manila.

"Having the images at home makes us feel that we're very close to God. It also unifies the neighborhood, at least during Good Friday, as everybody helps in decorating the images for the procession," Morano added.

On Holy Wednesday until Good Friday, many visit their home to offer flowers and pray to Santo Intierro. She said people also send in help for the image.

"The 'carroza' of Santo Intierro, which is made of narra, was donated," she disclosed.

Donations

Morano claimed that as Lenten season approaches, they start receiving donations from friends and other people whom they do not know.

She said the donations come in the forms of clothing for the image, food, sacks of rice and other items.

Dehlia Napay Rebustillo, 78, of Barangay Pinaric here, who owns the image of the Makatolong Pagkadunkal ni Cristo (Third Fall of Christ) for more than 50 years now, recalled that in past years, two weeks before the Holy Week, life was very hard and money seemed to be scarce. But when Easter Sunday was nearing, blessings from the Creator abundantly poured to her family.

"The practice of the faithful of keeping images like the Santo Intierro, the Third Fall of Christ and the Dolorosa, which are displayed during the processions, locally called "paso," on Good Wednesday and Good Friday—is greatly attributed to the spread of Christianity by the Spaniards centuries ago," said Fr. Jovic Lobrigo of the St. Gregory the Great Cathedral.

The procession of life-sized icons depicting the passion of Christ has been highly practiced by the Roman Catholics since time immemorial, he said.

And to emphasize the importance of these icons, Rev. Msgr. Cris Bernarte Jr., Saint Gregory Parish priest, said he came up with the Renewed Integral Evangelization Program to educate the Catholics about the images that form part of the suffering of Christ.

He said that on Good Friday, before the procession starts, each image will be introduced and the public will be reminded of how the Savior had suffered and died just to save mankind from sins.

He said having and keeping images of the passion of the Christ at home is a good sign that the Catholics have a very strong faith in God.

But to maintain solemnity in observing the suffering of Christ, Bernarte said, the Church has asked the faithful to do the Station of the Cross in churches and that owners of the icons must not over-decorate them. *Michael Jaucian, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

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INQUIRER Northern Luzon

Editor Jun Bandayrel
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The wounds of 'Kristo'

By Tonette Orejas
City of San Fernando

RUBEN Enaje says he has more reasons to get himself nailed to the cross on Good Friday. Not that this time around, he made three bigger wooden crosses, the biggest reserved for his 19th year of crucifixion.

This is also going to be his fourth year as the main Kristo (Christ), the central character in his village's street play of the Via Crucis (Way of the Cross).

Truth is, says the 44-year-old carpenter-painter, he has real crosses to bear and beatings to endure.

First, Enaje and more than 100 families in Purok 5 and 6 in Barangay San Pedro Cutud in the City of San Fernando are threatened to be evicted.

Landowners, never been heard or seen in the last 40 or so years, have begun reclaiming their property or selling these for P1,000 per square meter.

The provincial government, on the other hand, intends to use the property of the National Housing Authority in the village as a housing site for more than 1,000 capitol employees.

Second, Enaje and more than a dozen of men and women, who take to the cross yearly as a form of penance or *panata* (vow), stand to lose their local version of Calvary.

Beginning 1992, their Calvary has been a seven-foot high hill made out of Mt. Pinatubo's lahar—the same volcanic sand, ash and mud that buried the village starting 1991.

This hill on Purok 4, says Enaje, is a silent witness to the rare, excruciatingly painful expressions of faith, making Cutud, unofficially, the Calvary of the Philippines.

Three huge crosses are simultaneously raised there at noon on Good Friday, bearing the beaten bodies of penitents who allow their palms and feet punctured by nails and who, for some five to 10 minutes, quietly recite their thanksgiving or prayers for good health, salvation from sins and poverty.

Hooded flagellants

It is also where thousands of hooded flagellants, old and young, end the bloody wounding and whipping of their backs by embracing the hot, dusty grounds at noon.

Catholics and non-Catholics alike—some packed with faith, others just curious—converge at Cutud to view this reenactment of Christ's persecution more than 2,000 years ago.

The homes and the hill are close to the heart of Enaje.

"Most of my neighbors are drivers of three-wheelers (bikes attached with sidecars for passengers), fish ball vendors, makers of smoked fish, stevedores in the market, junk merchants and house helpers. Where would our families go if they throw us out?" he asks.

Anticipating violence from their resistance to leave the area, Enaje prays for himself and his neighbors. "*Eke mu sana dalumdum kaisipan* (May we not lose our calm)."

He says provincial officials have promised to replace the hill with a one-hectare lot.

But he's uncompromising.

"It has been like a holy land for us already," says Enaje, who began his *panata* after he fell from a building he was painting in 1985.

Surviving that accident without any broken bone or major bruises, he thought crucifixion or sharing in the Lord's pain was the best way to thank for his second chance at life.

He followed the path that itinerant healer Apung Temyong began in the 1950s. Back then the Kristos were tied on ropes.

The nailing began in the 1970s, either bolstered by the government's promotion of the event as a tourist spectacle or by the crisis that Mt. Pinatubo wrought on an already poor people. Testimonials of miracle drew more men to the crucifixion.

In his case, Enaje says he has earned God's graces because his family had never missed a meal, his wife Nita and their four children are healthy, and jobs in shirt printing, streamers and signboard making come regularly.

"God blesses those who labor hard," he says.

THESE nails, soaked for weeks in an alcohol-filled bottle placed behind the image of the Sto. Niño, are going to pierce the palms and feet of Ruben Enaje on his 19th year of crucifixion this Good Friday. TONETTE OREJAS

Fanaticism or faith in crucified Christ?

By E. Caldez
Cagayan

THE ITAWES and Ibanags of Cagayan are among the most ardent followers of the Catholic faith. Some of them, however, observe Lenten rituals and activities that others may find bordering between deep faith and fanaticism in the crucified Christ.

Those who fast and practice abstinence during the 40-day Lenten season end this sacrifice only on Black Saturday when they relish on wild chickens and whatever meat they can afford.

As the Lenten season starts, their utensils, plates and ladles are separated from those used by other members of the family to ensure that they adhere to the practice and their utensils are not "contaminated" by those who eat meat.

One of the peculiar Lenten practices in the province is the search for the "one-eyed" coconut that starts on Holy Wednesday.

Elders say the coconut will be used in creating coconut oil on Good Friday. The oil extracted on that day from that specific type of coconut will cure body pain, fever, headache and skin diseases.

But some believers have selfish intentions. Elders said they closely watch some fanatics who linger inside churches before 3 p.m. on Good Friday because it is not uncommon that even candles and fingers of icons are stolen.

During the Good Friday procession, some fanatics grab flowers that decorate the floats because they believe that these will make their businesses prosper and protect them from harm.

Some ask float handlers to allow them to put small bottles of newly extracted coconut oil on the floats during the procession.

Many Cagayanos, like other Catholics, hold vigil for the dead Christ (Santo Entierro) and patiently line up to kiss the icon's feet.

In the villages, family members gather to complete the singing of the pacio (the Passion of Christ) and *leccio* (lamentations), or the *pabasa*.

When the pealing of church bells signals the end of the weeklong gloom on Black Saturday, some villagers whip, shake or smoke their fruit trees in the belief that these will bear more fruits.

Many villagers use the day to rest and be with family members as they feel spiritually and physically invigorated for another year ahead.

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BAGUIO
What Drives You
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(from March 23 to 27, except March 25, Good Friday)

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*Not included in the LPG Tankito Promo

Holy Week
For motorist assistance from March 23 to 27 (except March 25, Good Friday), visit any of these Caltex stations:

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NORTH
• Tarlac, Tarlac • Capas, Tarlac • Carmen, Pangasinan • Mac Arthur Hi-way, Urdaneta Pangasinan (South Bound) • Mac Arthur Hi-way, Urdaneta Pangasinan (North Bound) • Alaminos, Pangasinan • Rosario, La Union • Chanum cor. Otek St., Burnham, Baguio • Agoo, La Union • Olongapo-Gapan Road, Guagua, Pampanga • Sta. Rita, Olongapo City, Olongapo • Maharlika Hi-way, Cabanatuan • Daan Sarile, Cabanatuan • Plaridel, Bulacan • Upper Session Road, Baguio • Angeles City • NFPC, R-10, Navotas

Farmers want direct role in ₱225-M irrigation plan

By Juan Escandor Jr.
PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

NAGA CITY—The National Confederation of Irrigators Associations (NCIA) has demanded from the government direct participation of farmers in the implementation of the P225 million World Bank-funded rehabilitation project in Bicol to make it work.

Silvestre Bonto, NCIA spokesperson, said they had negotiated with the national office of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) that irrigators' associations in Bicol be tapped as subcontractors and that farmer-beneficiaries be hired as laborers.

Bonto said they had also demanded that there must be consultation with farmer-beneficiaries before any work on the rehabilitation project would be undertaken.

He claimed that the direct participation of irrigators' associations and farmer-beneficiaries would address the actual rehabilitation needs because they themselves knew the real situation of government-run irrigation facilities.

Real situation

The NCIA spokesperson added that the P225-million rehabilitation project due for implementation from 2006 to 2010 was a loan package to be paid by the government from the irrigation service fees payment of the farmer-beneficiaries.

He said that according to the rehabilitation plan, the completion of the project would increase by 842 hectares the irrigated ricefarms from 2,700 hectares to 3,542 hectares in the towns of Calabanga, Bombon, Magarao and Canaman in Camarines Sur province.

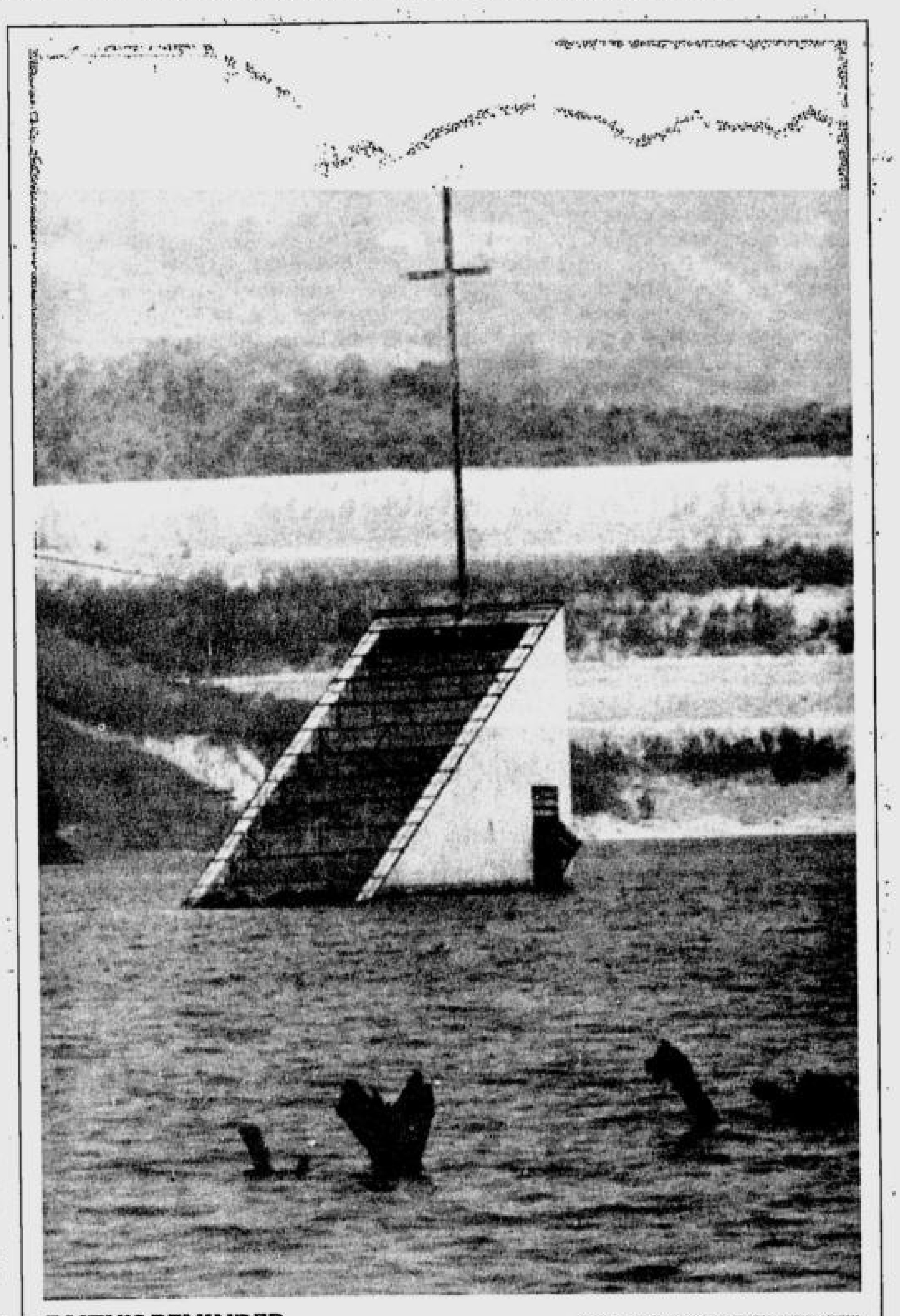
Bonto said the rehabilitation of the irrigation facilities in the four contiguous towns would also increase the harvest by 80,000 bags of *palay* in one cropping season.

Increased harvest

He further claimed that the demand of the NCIA to be directly involved in the project implementation stemmed from complaints of irrigators' associations regarding alleged irregularities in the so-called impact projects worth P25 million, which was implemented last year.

Farmers are facing a drought as a result of the El Niño phenomenon expected to hit the country this year.

But farmers in Nueva Ecija said the drought was the least of their concern because the water level at the Pantabangan Dam was still high and could still supply the amount of water they needed for irrigation.



FAITH'S REMINDER TONETTE OREJAS/PDI CENTRAL LUZON DESK

Submerged by water and Mt. Pinatubo's lahar from the Sto. Tomas River, the Church in Barangay Buhawen below the Dizon Mines in San Marcelino, Zambales is a reminder that a community of miners once lived and practiced the Catholic faith there.

Diarrhea kills 4 kids, takes ill 81 others

TACLOBAN CITY—Four children died while 81 others fell ill following an outbreak of diarrhea in Barangay Jangtud, Palapag town, Northern Samar.

Palapag Mayor Ricardo Daiz said the four children were between four to 10 years old. The latest fatality died last Sunday.

He added that many of the 81 people who were afflicted of diarrhea were still confined at the Laoang District Hospital in Laoang town, about 15 km from Palapag.

"But the situation is now under control although we have to asked from our provincial as well as from the regional health offices for additional medicines to give these to the victims," Daiz told the INQUIRER in an interview through his mobile phone.

Symptoms

The mayor said the diarrhea outbreak started last week when many of the residents suffered severe abdominal pains, loose, watery stools and vomiting.

Officials from the Department of Health in Eastern Visayas, led by regional director Milagros Bacus, on Monday went to Jangtud, about 10 km from the town proper, to investigate the outbreak.

Although the team has yet to come up with the results of their investigation, the health officials suspected that the diarrhea might have been caused by the "sealed type" deep well, which was the source of drinking water of the residents here.

Cleanliness drive

In the meantime, Daiz said he initiated a cleanliness drive in Jangtud and other villages in Palapag to avoid the spread of the disease.

"This (cleanliness drive) is the easiest thing that we can do to avoid any similar incident," he said.

Palapag is a fourth class municipality located 60 km from the capital town of Catarman with a population of more than 31,000 spread in its 32 barangays.

Joey Gabieta, PDI Visayas Bureau

Signature drive for comfort women launched Asia-wide

BAGUIO CITY—Filipino war veterans, comfort women and their sympathizers are joining a signature drive across Asia to block Japan's bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council.

Activist Nelia Sancho, a former beauty queen, said comfort women from the Philippines, China, Taiwan and Korea are raising a million signatures to remind the UN about Japan's human rights obligations to the surviving comfort women of Asia.

"In February, I attended a meeting in Japan which finalized a plan for action joined by all the [affected countries with comfort women] to collect one million signatures this year," said Sancho.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of World War II, a period when Japanese troops herded Asian women into sex garrisons to service soldiers manning occupied territories.

President Macapagal-Arroyo is caught in the middle of this campaign after her government endorsed Japan's UN bid, Sancho told the INQUIRER last week.

She said Speaker Jose de Venecia railroaded a resolution supporting Japan, in spite of the fact that comfort women sympathizers labored for 14 years to see comfort women get compensation.

None of these measures had passed the committee level, but the House resolution on Japan's UN bid was endorsed in a matter of minutes, Sancho said.

No passage

In January, the Department of Foreign Affairs also dangled a "carrot" for each of the comfort women who will withdraw their opposition to Japan, she said.

Parañaque Rep. Roilo Golez, Ms Arroyo's former national security adviser, sponsored the bill allocating P5 million each for comfort women survivors on condition that they stop implicating Japan.

The House foreign affairs committee discussed Golez's measure, ignoring a resolution filed by Gabriela party-list Rep. Liza Maza and Marikina Rep. Del de Guzman that supports a measure in the Japanese Diet that benefits the comfort women crusade, Sancho said.

Deceptive

This Japanese bill introduces compensation packages for the Pacific War victims of Japan, but it has been refiled for the last few years due to opposition from the ruling party in the Diet.

Sancho, who had been spearheading the fight for comfort women in the last 14 years, said Japanese response to the plight of Asia's comfort women had been deceptive.

Japan had initially resisted the crusade but its government softened its stance a few years ago when it instituted the Asian women's fund.

Officially, the fund is Japan's act of "moral atonement" for its war crimes, Sancho said, but the country's comfort women refused its coverage because money from the fund was not classified as legal compensation.

The fund was supposed to thrive only from 1997 to 2001, but there were indications it was stretched to cover the expenses of non-government organizations working for comfort women, she said.

But the fund, which ends its term in 2007, is seen as "a complete failure," prompting countries with stake in the comfort women crusade to mount a new drive against Japan, Sancho said.

Half of the 175 comfort women in the Philippines have already died, she said. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Speech on staying in RP moves graduates to tears

By Alex V. Pal
PDI Visayas Bureau

DUMAGUETE CITY—At a time when many college graduates are think of going abroad to start a life, a simple message proclaiming that there is hope for the country could be enough to drive some people to tears.

Dr. Alan Ortiz, National Transmission Co. (Transco) president, exhorted the 134 graduates of the Diocese of Dumaguete's Colegio de Sta. Catalina de Alejandria (Cosca), to choose to live, pursue careers and retire peacefully here in the Philippines.

"Like many of you, I have close relatives who have lost hope in our country and migrated abroad," said Ortiz, who is also a director in a nursing placement company.

But many Filipinos abroad, he said, are affected by the strain of having multiple jobs.

He said that if the Philippines offered better opportunities, many Filipinos would not have to see leaving the country as an immediate recourse rather than a last.

"I dream of a time many of you can and will be able to say that staying in the Philippines is a decision you took instead of a sad reality that you accepted," he said.

Ortiz expressed confidence that with stable power from Transco, Dumaguete may be able to attract more Information Technology (IT)-based businesses that will take advantage of its fiber optic cable network, which is among the most advanced in the world.

Ortiz said Transco would build the electricity infrastructure that would power communities, invite new investments and boost the economy, to allow many Dumagueteños to stay and pursue careers without having to cut their roots.

He said that the Philippines now has a new generation of enlightened leaders in all sectors of society. "I have met them, talked to them. Their passion for progress is real. Their commitment to elevate our development status is genuine."

Fr. Enrique Balongag, Cosca vice president for academic affairs, noted that many students and parents were in tears.

"Ortiz' message was, by far, the most powerful graduation speech I had heard," Balongag said.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Wednesday, March 23, 2005
Wednesday of Holy Week

1st Reading: Is 50:4-9
Gospel: Matthew 26:14-25

The one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went off to the chief priests and said, "How much will you give me if I hand him over to you?" They promised to give him thirty pieces of silver, and from then on he kept looking for the best way to hand him over to them.

On the first day of the Festival of the Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and said to him, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?" Jesus answered, "Go into the city, to the house of a certain man, and tell him: 'The Master says: My hour is near, and I will celebrate the Passover with my disciples in your house."

The disciples did as Jesus had ordered and prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, Jesus sat at table with the Twelve. While they were eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you: one of you will betray me." They were deeply distressed and asked him in turn, "You do not mean me, do you, Lord?"

He answered, "He who will betray me is one of those who dips his bread in the dish with me. The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures say he will. But alas for that one who betrays the Son of Man; better for him not to have been born." Judas, who was betraying him, also asked, "You do not mean me, Master, do you?" Jesus replied, "You have said it."

Commentary

This is often called Spy Wednesday because it remembers Judas and his betrayal of Jesus, staying among the group, sharing the last intimacies yet already intent on handing Jesus over according to prior arrangement for thirty pieces of silver. All the preparations are made to celebrate the feast of freedom and liberation while there are others seeking death and oppression once again. The other disciples are just ignoring the hostilities all around them and they have already rejected Jesus' words on his coming suffering and death. They just don't want to hear it and are intent on their own time with Jesus and what they want him to be for them. And where are we? Do we betray our God because of money, prestige, our own ideas of who and what we think God is and how God works in the world? Do we resist Jesus' call to resist evil without violence or harm to others? Do we just ignore the evil and violence all around us and concentrate on our own relationships with Jesus and what we want from God? Do we ever think that our God wants to share his cross, his rejection and suffering and death with us—calling us to share in his death so as to share in his life and resurrection? Lord, Son of Man, may we not betray you this time, but stand fast and faithful.

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Firms join hands to help Bohol poison victims

By Chito A. Fuentes
PDI Visayas Bureau

TAGBILARAN CITY—Thanks to a joint undertaking, 20 siblings of food poisoning victims in Mabini town will receive free computer training from Informatics.

The scholarship project is part of Leadership Unlimited Step-Easy Project, which is a joint undertaking among the Aurelio Periquet Jr. Foundation, the Bohol provincial board and Informatics Holdings.

Step-Easy is the acronym for skills training enhancement program-employment accessibility for the youth.

"It is our way of somehow comforting the grieving families," said Vice Gov. Julius Caesar Herrera, the provincial board's presiding officer.

Herrera said it was the desire of the project partners to help the families of the Mabini poisoning by making them priority beneficiaries.

"While we may no longer restore the lives carelessly lost, hopefully in this little way we will be able to help them rebuild their lives all over again," he added.

According to the memorandum of agreement signed last March 18 in Tagbilaran City, Informatics will give free computer training to 20 scholars in Bohol as identified by the provincial board and the foundation.

In turn, the foundation will include Informatics in all the marketing collateral and publicity campaign for the project.

Aside from Herrera, the other signatories were Anna Marie Periquet for the foundation and Leo Riingen, Informatics president and chief executive officer.

Also present was Luis Pellicer III, whose firm manufactures Uni ballpens.

The provincial board will identify the possible scholars for the project aside from monitoring the completion of the scholars' requirements, the development of the training, attendance and welfare of the scholars for the duration of the project.

Leaders Unlimited, the project proponent, was formed to pay tribute to former Speaker Ramon Mitra and business leaders Luis Pellicer Jr., Aurelio Periquet Jr. and Camilo Riingen.

Their children, Bernardo Mitra, Anna Marie Periquet, Luis Pellicer III and Leo Riingen, form the core group of Leaders Unlimited, which is now on its fourth year.

SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

POLITICAL LAW (CITIZENSHIP)—Publication—A plain reading of Section 9 of CA 473 (Revised Naturalization Law) shows that for there to be a valid publication, the following requisites must concur: (1) the petition and notice of hearing must be published; (2) the publication must be once a week for three consecutive weeks; and, (3) the publication must be in the official gazette and in a newspaper of general circulation in the province where the applicant resides. The said provision also requires that copies of the petition and notice of hearing must be posted in the office of the clerk of court or in the building where the office is located. Further, the petition shall not be heard within six months from the date of last publication of the notice. Publication is a jurisdictional requirement and non-compliance therewith affects the jurisdiction of the court. Significantly, the solicitor general, personally or through his delegate, and the provincial fiscals, are the only officers or persons authorized by law to appear on behalf of the government and oppose an application for naturalization or move for the cancellation of a naturalization certificate already issued. The government as an agency of the people represents the public, and therefore the solicitor general who appears on behalf of the government represents the public. [Citations omitted.] [Justice Callejo, Sr., Second Division, Republic vs Keh, G. R. No. 144742, November 11, 2004]

BY R. B. VERA

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US Immigration harasses Loi in San Francisco airport

From page A1

shoes famously figured in a run-in with a Fil-Am US immigration officer in 2002, yesterday denounced the alleged maltreatment suffered by Sen. Luisa "Loi" Ejercito, the wife of jailed ex-President Estrada, at the hands of US immigration personnel on March 20.

Ejercito complained that she was detained for one-and-a-half hours at the San Francisco International Airport and asked such questions as whether she thought her husband would be convicted of plunder.

Apologize all around

But at least Ejercito did not need to go on an extended rant over her alleged ordeal.

Various US entities promptly offered apologies and regrets over the incident after the Philippine ambassador to the US, Alberto del Rosario, lodged a formal protest.

Drilon said US Ambassador Francis Ricciardone called him up to apologize.

He said Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo also reported that the US State Department in Washington had also apologized.

Drilon broke the news to reporters after receiving a call from Ejercito early yesterday.

Shabby treatment

"As Senate President, I denounce this shabby treatment of a duly elected Filipino senator in the hands of US immigration officials. These unnecessary and uncalled-for cases of harassment of Filipino officials at US airports should stop," he said.

Ejercito told Drilon that when she arrived in San Francisco with her daughter Jackie Estrada-Lopez and her grandchildren on March 20, they were met at the arrival tube by a team from the US homeland security department and segregated from other passengers.

Then she was held in a US immigration cubicle for one-and-a-half hours and was interrogated by officers led by a certain Mr. Pangan, a Filipino-American.

At one point during the interrogation, Ejercito said Pangan asked her several questions about the graft charges against her jailed husband and whether she thought he would be convicted.

Irrelevant questioning

"Such questions have nothing to do with US immigration laws. I wonder why a member of the Philippine Senate had to be subjected to such irrelevant questioning," said Drilon.

Drilon said Ricciardone phoned him later yesterday to "apologize for the incident."

"The ambassador was apologetic and promised to get to the bottom of the case," he said.

He said Ricciardone promised he would contact the US State Department in Washington to "get details of what actually happened."

Much later, Drilon would get a call from Romulo who reported that the US State Department "expressed regret."

Asked if that would suffice, Drilon said: "Well, at least they realized their error and hopefully they will make corrective measures."

Drilon said Ejercito had sought permission from him to go to the US to speak before various Filipino communities in California. According to the travel order issued by the Senate, she will be in the US from March 22 to April 9.

EJERCITO: Detained for 1½ hours

DRILON: If the shoe fits...

At no expense to gov't

Congress is on its customary Lenten break from March 18 to April 11. Many senators and House members use the break to travel abroad, ostensibly on official business, for which they receive travel allowances and have all their expenses paid.

But Drilon claimed that Ejercito was making the trip "at no expense to the government."

He said it was not clear to either Ejercito or Ricciardone why the senator was held at the San Francisco airport.

In late 2002, Drilon balked at being made to take off his shoes for a security check at the same airport. An angry and embarrassed Drilon said that his stature as an official of the Republic of the Philippines entitled that he be extended the appropriate courtesies. He made a big issue of it when he returned, demanding that the Department of Foreign Affairs lodge a diplomatic protest with Washington.

Enrile, too

Last month, Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile said he had been advised by officials of the US Embassy "not to travel to the US either on official business as a member of the Philippine Senate or as a tourist to avoid any embarrassment" on arrival at any port of entry.

Enrile, who raised the issue during the confirmation hearings of Romulo, said he was later informed that his visa had been canceled.

A close associate of Enrile, Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, while still a senator, was issued a US visa for an official trip but his visa had a notation saying he was "subject to special inspection," according to a Senate staffer.

Honasan and Enrile were linked to several destabilization attempts during the Aquino administration. Honasan is facing coup d'etat charges with the Department of Justice for his alleged involvement in the failed coup of July 2003.

Following the September 2001 terrorist attacks, the US has imposed travel and financial sanctions against more than 25 foreign groups, including the Abu Sayyaf and the communist New People's Army, suspected of engaging in terrorist activities.

US court sets $50,000 bail for ex-PNP colonel

From page A1

NBI Interpol chief Ricardo Diaz said he had been informed by the US Department of Homeland Security's Manila office about the fixing of the bail amount by a US court.

"We are opposing the bail, but as you know, his [Aquino] detention is administrative," Julian Briola, the deputy chief for Manila of the DHS, told Diaz in a text message.

US wants documents

"We have at least 24 hours to prevent him from bonding out," said Briola who said US authorities would need the documents showing Aquino's alleged involvement in the murder of publicist Bubby Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito in November 2000.

But Diaz said the NBI would not be able to provide the documents in the time given them.

"We are still in the process of getting the documents," he said, adding that the Lenten season could also delay their obtaining the necessary documents on time.

Briola then told Diaz that "they would do what they could to hold Aquino in custody."

Deportation process still on

But even if the former police superintendent were to be granted bail, the deportation proceedings against him would continue, said Diaz.

"If Aquino escapes, the bail will be canceled and he will be subjected to a manhunt," he said.

Supt. Glenn Dumlao had tagged Aquino and Cesar Mancao, also a former police superintendent, in the Dacer-Corbito murders.

The two are former close associates of Sen. Panfilo Lacson who headed the defunct Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF) during the Estrada administration.

Aquino and Mancao were among 22 people charged with the abduction and murder of Dacer and his driver. Several members of the PAOCTF were charged along with them.

But the two men were able to flee the country in July 2001 despite hold-departure orders against them, reportedly flying to Hong Kong on fake passports, then to the United States using genuine travel papers.

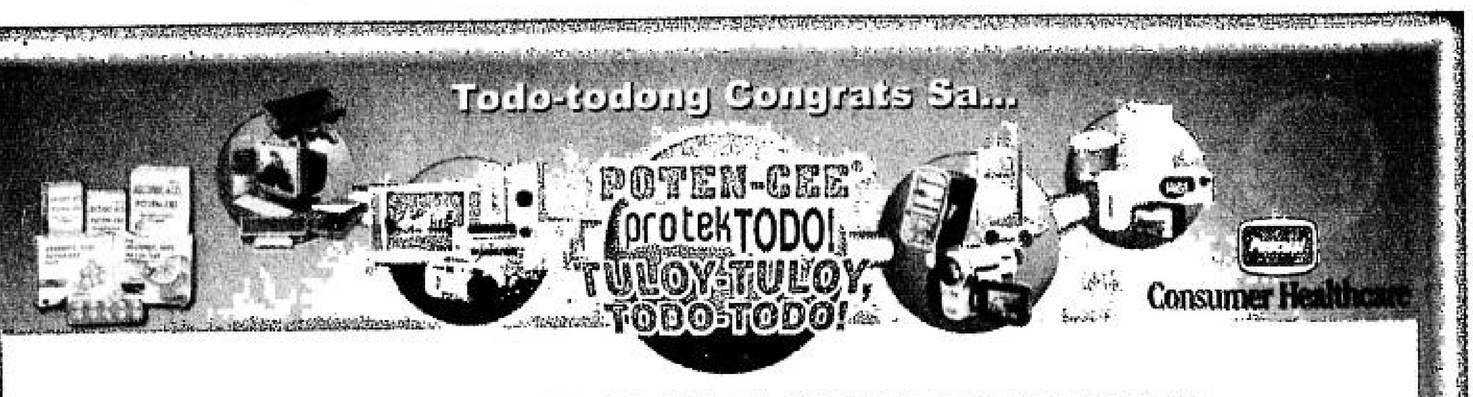
Diaz said in interviews last week that the NBI had no warrant to arrest Aquino because the court had rejected Dumlao's statement linking him and Mancao to the double murder.

No arrest warrant

The Dacer-Corbito murder case was stalled in 2002 when Aquino and Mancao challenged before the Supreme Court a Court of Appeals decision that ruled that the two should be charged with the crime.

The case cannot proceed until the high court issues a ruling on the issue.

Without an arrest warrant, the justice department cannot seek Aquino's extradition.



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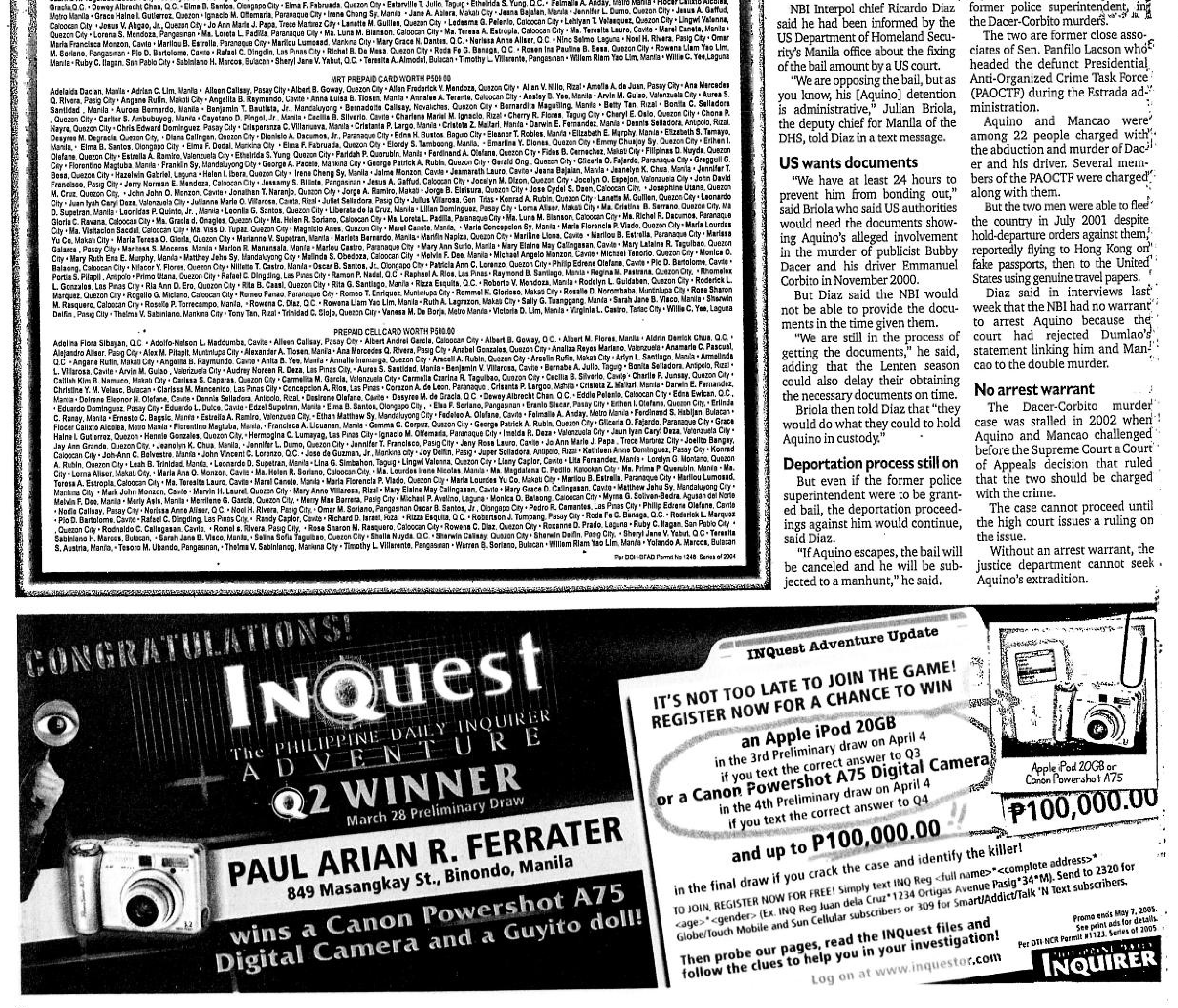
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Chic city keeps tradition alive

By Margaux C. Ortiz

MAKATI invokes images of a city of the future. But in the shadow of its modern skyscapers, traditions of old are kept alive.

German Ojales grew up to the sound of church bells, hushed prayers and melodic chants.

Born to pious parents in the deeply religious community of Barangay Poblacion, *Mang* German learned his faith's traditions by heart at a very early age.

"I was really interested in anything religious," *Mang* German said in Filipino. "At an age when children usually scraped their knees playing in the streets, I was gladly serving as a sacristan in our parish."

But he said he was far from being sanctimonious. Nonetheles, the deeply devout community had ingrained in him love for the Roman Catholic religion.

"There was an unspoken rule that everyone, including children, should participate in all church activities especially during the Holy Week," the 80-year-old Makati native said.

He recounted that even little children rushed home before 6 p.m. to recite the Angelus.

At the age of 12, *Mang* German learned to read and chant the *Pasyon*, a narrative of the passion and death of Jesus Christ in the vernacular.

Since then, he looked forward to Holy Week each year so he could participate in the *Pabasa*, where the *Pasyon* was chanted.

It even continued until after he got married, had children and grandchildren.

Now, almost seven decades since he first held the "*Pasyong* Mahal ni Hesukristo" and tentatively sang its opening verses, *Mang* German has vowed to continue this tradition and pass it on to the younger generation.

"I have patiently taught all my children and grandchildren to read the *Pasyon*," *Mang* German said, his calloused hands shaking as he held the tattered book.

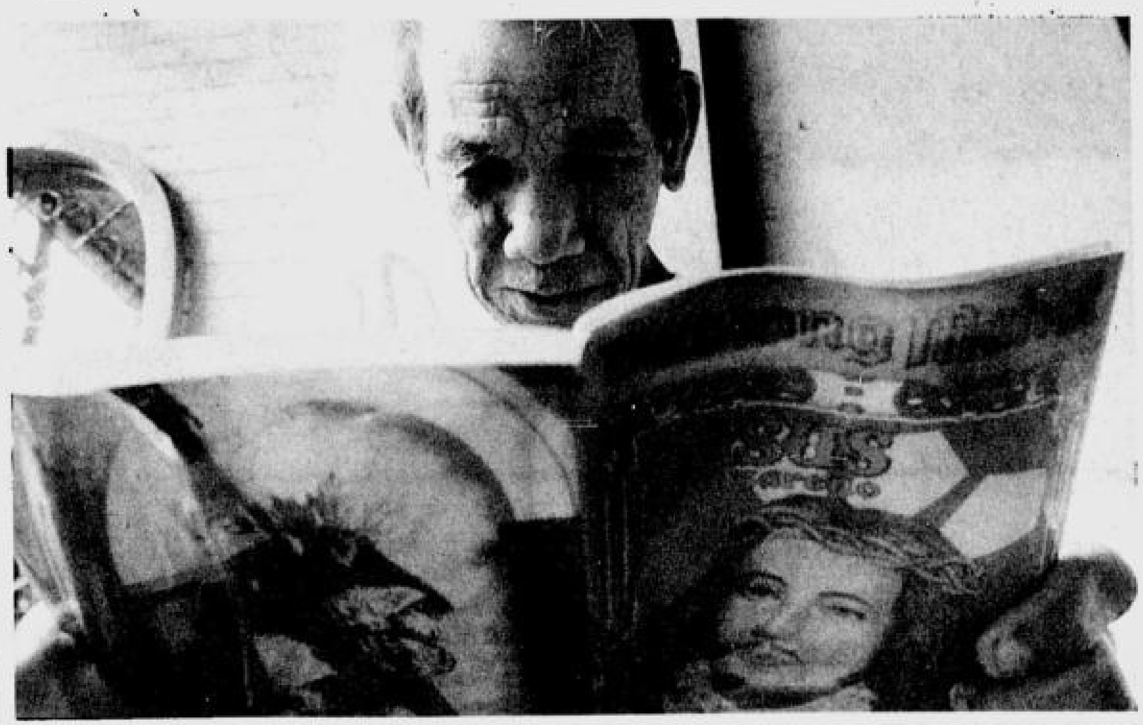
He stressed in a soft but unwavering voice, "It is important that they value our town's beautiful, religious practices."

Mang German related that days before Holy Week, it had been the tradition in the former town proper to construct the *kalbaryo*, temporary altars or houses built on the streets where the *pabasa* is held.

Residents take pride in making their *kalbaryo* as elaborate as they could, some large enough to occupy an entire street, others complete with life-size papier mache Christ figures.

For *Mang* German and his neighbors, their *kalbaryo*—aptly called D'Saint, or Samahang Ilalim ng Tulay—sits under the Makati-Mandaluyong bridge.

Although he begins reading the *Pasyon* with other "old souls" as early as Palm Sunday, the "formal" reading of the *pabasa* inside the *kalbaryo* starts on the night of Holy Wednesday.



AGE has not prevented German Ojales from reading the Pasyon during the annual Pabasa in Makati's Barangay Poblacion. ERIK ARAZAS

Mang German explained that the *pabasa* begins after the procession of crosses, which include the 6-ft. tall Bara Alta, or Sacred Cross, and a number of other smaller crosses from the different *kalbaryos*.

"When the crosses pass by a particular *kalbaryo*, this is a signal for the *kalbaristas* to begin the *pabasa*," *Mang* German said.

The *pabasa*, *Mang* German emphasized, is a serious tradition which should be treated with utmost respect and reverence.

"Some even giggle and snicker during the chanting," the octogenarian said, shaking his head disapprovingly. "When you listen to the *Pasyon*'s verses, and reflect on its message, it would be impossible for you not to be moved to tears."

Mang German is also particular about the way the *Pasyon* is read, stressing that the old melody should be still used.

"Many of the young people in our neighborhood use modern tunes, which I really disapprove of," *Mang* German said.

Luz Joaquin, a city hall employee, affirmed *Mang* German's passion for the *Pasyon*.

"He would stay up really late to keep watch especially if there are no other people at the *kalbaryo*," Joaquin said.

She added with a grin, "It never ceases to amaze us that *Mang* German could still read the *pabasa* without any eyeglasses on!"

Senakulo adapted to times

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

BORED of the traditional version? Check out this "modern" version of the Senakulo, a dramatization of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, in Mandaluyong.

"Instead of singing, we will deliver the dialogs naturally," said Manny Ampaya, over-all director of the presentation sponsored by the Barangay Hagdan Bato Itaas Samahang Matiaga Cenaculista.

With the use of dialogue and after cutting out 75 percent of the original script written 50 years ago, the group said their version would be shorter.

On top of this, they would use popular theater songs to make it more contemporary.

"If we do not modernize our presentation, we will lose our audience," Ampaya added.

He said that viewers now were mostly teenagers brought up in the age of fast-paced music videos.

Their version will run tonight until Saturday at the Plaza Tatlong Bayani from 8 p.m. to midnight.

Despite being modern, Ampaya said the "culture is still [in our presentation]."

People wishing to witness the traditional version of the Senakulo can still catch it in Barangay Barangka. It started Monday night and will end on Saturday.

The group Samahang Kabataan ng San Roque Senakulista ng Barangka still maintains the "Pasyon" style but actors will be accompanied by an orchestra, the city public information said.

Project coordinator Nolan Angeles said in a statement their version remained faithful to the original interpretation.

"It's like seeing it 50 years ago," he added.

Joining the Senakulo has been a devotion for members of these groups.

Umiray-Angat tunnel reopened; water service back

By Blanche S. Rivera

STARTING Saturday, some 40,000 households in Metro Manila will finally enjoy a steady supply of water.

An additional 2 cubic meters per second of water would be released by the National Water Resources Board to the Metropolitan Water and Sewerage System on March 26. NWRB Chair Ramon Alikpala said the daily water supply would be raised from 39.7 cubic meter per second to 41 cubic meter per second following the completion of the repairs on the Umiray-Angat tunnel which was blocked by felled trees and loose soil during the storms last December.

"That should help relieve the concern of some 40,000 households who have had no or little water for the past months," Alikpala said. Almost 30 percent of Maynilad Water Corp.'s west zone had been waterless, prompting the utility company to deploy over 100 mobile tankers for water rationing.

The most affected areas were parts of the cities of Parañaque, Las Piñas, Manila, Navotas, Malabon, Caloocan and Quezon.

"On the part of irrigation, this would help maintain the water level of Angat dam," Alikpala added. The dam's water level, recorded at 185 meters last week, had been steadily declining. The NWRB had predicted that it would break the 180-meter critical mark by the end of the month.

2 airport thieves nabbed

By Nikko Dizon

TWO men who tried to run away with a passenger's luggage were arrested by security men at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia) at around noon Sunday.

Authorities identified the suspects as Roswaldo Ramos and Gener Orbita, both of Tondo, Manila.

They were chased by security guards and members of the Airport Police Department (APD) at the Mabuhay Complex of the Naia Terminal 1, who saw them take two pieces of luggage from a parked light blue Toyota FX, Capt. Alden Guy, officer in charge of the APD Police Intelligence and Investigation Division said in a report.

Meanwhile, flights were delayed at the Naia after a mechanized cargo loader hit a Philippine Airlines plane that had just arrived from Saigon, Vietnam, yesterday afternoon.

The cargo loader rammed the nose landing gear of flight PR 592, an Airbus A330 at the airports Gate 43 at 1:41 p.m., according to authorities.

A different Holy Week experience

THE BUKAL ng Tipan is offering a unique Holy Week Experience on the Hill in Maryhill Compound in Taytay, Rizal, beginning Holy Thursday up to Black Saturday.

The program includes a Last Supper in the Garden on Holy Thursday and discovering the "Peter" in us around a bonfire in the evening, carrying a cross to the top of the hill at high noon of Good Friday, or just being a "Simon" or "Veronica" to someone along the way.

The Bukal ng Tipan Team, together with Fr. Mark Lesage, CICM, will lead the reflections and the liturgical celebrations. The venue, Maryhill Compound, is at Km. 22 on the Road to Antipolo, Taytay.

For information, call 6585064 or 0917-8865498.

MMDA to guard metro's exit points for Easter rush

MEMBERS of the Western Police District special weapons and tactics team take positions outside the Basilica of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo, Manila, to thwart any terrorist attempt to attack the shrine or pilgrims during the Holy Week. ERIK ARAZAS

THE METROPOLITAN Manila Development Authority (MMDA) would be guarding the metropolis' main exit points throughout the week to safeguard commuters headed to their home provinces and vacation spots.

Yesterday, the MMDA began the deployment of 2,800 traffic enforcers in main access roads, including the thoroughfares of Edsa and Roxas Boulevard, C-5 Road, McArthur Highway, and the South Luzon Expressway, according to MMDA Deputy Chair Cesar Lacuna.

The MMDA also suspended the Unified Vehicular Volume Reduction Scheme starting today, when traffic was expected to be heaviest, he added.

The number coding scheme, meant to ease traffic on major roads, resumes on Monday next week.

Regular shifts of MMDA personnel yesterday and today were also extended. They are expected to serve as an augmentation force to policemen who had already been tasked to ensure security measures all over the region during the Holy Week exodus.

Traffic monitoring would, however, be strictest at the now congested MacArthur Highway, a main artery used as an alternative to the rehabilitated North Luzon Expressway (NLEX)

Yesterday, President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando to take a direct hand in monitoring traffic at the MacArthur Highway. North Luzon-bound motorists and commuters had clogged its Caloocan City to Pampanga stretch to avoid the 400 percent toll hike implemented in January at the NLEX.

MMDA's emergency stations on the Edsa intersection at East Avenue and Ortigas Avenue, and the agency's tow trucks, cranes, forklifts and wrecker trucks would be on standby to respond to emergency traffic situations.

Motorists who would need help in case of a traffic emergency may reach the MMDA by dialing 136, its hotline number.

The Makati police, meanwhile, has been on a tight watch over the city's hotels, malls and commercial buildings, said Chief Inspector Manuel Santos Jr., chief of the Central Business District (CBD) community precinct.

Apart from its mobile and foot patrols, the CBD precinct received support from the National Capital Region Police Office Regional Special Action Unit.

The Muntinlupa City police are also not taking any chances. Starting today, police would be conducting intensified security patrols along the city's major thoroughfares to provide traffic assistance to motorist and commuters.

The vicinity of Alabang, where thousands of commuters are likely to converge on their way to the southern or northern parts of Luzon, would also be tightly guarded by the local police, as well as its tourist spots, malls, and four churches.

Police patrol cars would also be deployed at the city's prominent and upscale subdivisions to secure residential houses against burglars.

The 9.3-kilometer Skyway, which runs from Magallanes to Bicutan, on the other hand, would be closed starting Holy Thursday until 5 a.m. of Black Saturday for repair and maintenance work, said Manny Frades, radio operator of the Philippine National Construction Corp.

Motorists, however, could take the South Luzon Expressway on the days the Skyway would be closed.

Meanwhile, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology Director Arturo Alit directed BJMP regional directors to place the jails under their respective jurisdiction on red alert status day until March 28. The directive covers the country's 1,156 jails.

The order came on the heels of a plea from the Taguig City council to the President requesting the removal of all jail facilities in the city.

A city council resolution said the botched jailbreak of suspected Abu Sayyaf members that led to the bloody police assault at Camp Bagong Diwa last week was "a concrete evidence of the peril or threat to which a city like Taguig hosting a major prison facility is exposed." *Tarra Quismundo, Gil Cabacungan Jr., Jocelyn Uy, Leila Salaverria, TJ Burgonio, Norman Bordadora*

Antipolo councilor shot in the face in failed rob

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

OUTSIDE, visitors were enjoying the amenities of his resort. Inside his office, he was bleeding after two robbers shot him in the face.

Early yesterday morning, two alleged robbers shot Antipolo City Councilor Mar Bacani inside his resort in Barangay Dela Paz.

He survived. He was rushed to a hospital in Taytay, Rizal, police said.

Bacani was inside his office at the Villa Virginia Resort in Sitio Taktak at about 12:30 a.m.

Suddenly, two men barged in, SPO1 Jesus Magno said.

The men, whom police believe were robbers, apparently did not know someone was in the office.

When they saw Bacani, the robbers could have panicked and shot the councilor, hitting him in the left cheek, Magno said.

The alleged robbers fled empty-handed, even leaving on the counter a black bull cap and the .38-caliber handgun they used.

Bacani managed to leave his office to seek help. Customers of the resort who were still at the poolside were shocked to see Bacani bleeding.

No one noticed the suspects take the stairs up to the councilor's office.

There were also no guards at the resort, police added.

Ruling out that the incident was an assassination attempt against the councilor, police later found that an employee of the resort had also been held up last week inside the resort.

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GOLF: LPGA Safeway International; 5:30 p.m.; ESPN – See J-Ro try to make it past the second round in her quest for another LPGA title.
Asian Tour – TCL Classic; 10 a.m. (r); STAR Sports – The Asian Tour continues in China.
BASKETBALL: NBA – Lakers vs Jazz; 10 a.m. (r-9 p.m.); Solar Sports; Heat vs Rockets; 10:30 a.m. (r-7 p.m.); Sports Plus – LA takes on Utah even as Shaq and Yao engage in a battle of big men when Miami visits Houston.
Schedules subject to change without prior notice.

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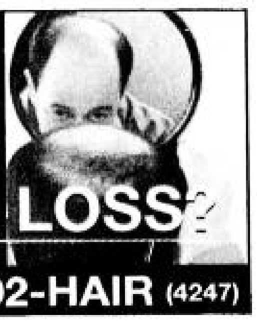
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'Juvic can't impose his will on us'

Nat'l golf head rejects Pagunsan demand, but says player still part of training pool

PAGUNSAN: Center of storm ERNIE U. SARMIENTO

PLAYERS should never impose their will on national sports associations (NSAs).

Not even if he is Juvic Pagunsan.

The National Golf Association of the Philippines (NGAP) yesterday said it won't give in to the demands of Pagunsan, the country's No. 1 amateur, just so he would don the national colors.

GOPEZ: Pagunsan is only an amateur.

Pagunsan last week said he would play for the RP men's squad for the last time in the Southeast Asian Games if golf "godfather" Enrique "Ricky" Razon would oversee the training of the team.

"He (Pagunsan) can't impose his condition on us," said NGAP head Benny Gopez during yesterday's PSA Forum at the Manila Pavilion. "I guess, *maski saan namang* (even in other) NSAs *hindi dapat ganun* (that shouldn't be the case)."

"First, (he's) only an amateur. Second this is for flag and country. I don't see a reason for him to set any conditions."

NGAP in charge

Besides, Gopez said, the NGAP is the one in-charge of all matters concerning golf in the country.

"*Wala kaming* (We don't have any) misunderstanding with Mr. Razon," the outspoken golf president said. "Our position here is that we are the NSA. We have our own training program. Otherwise, *kung ang mga* (if it's the) Godfathers *ang siyang magpapatakbo* (who will run our affairs), then *wala nang* relevance *pa ang mga* (NSAs (the NSAs will lose their relevance)."

He said he met with Razon over the weekend and the port services magnate never mentioned anything about the issue.

"I was waiting for him (Razon) to say something about it, *pero wala naman siyang sinabi* (but he didn't dwell on it)," said Gopez in the public sports program sponsored by Red Bull, Supermax, Circure and Pagcor.

"All that he stressed is for us to have the best team in the SEA Games."

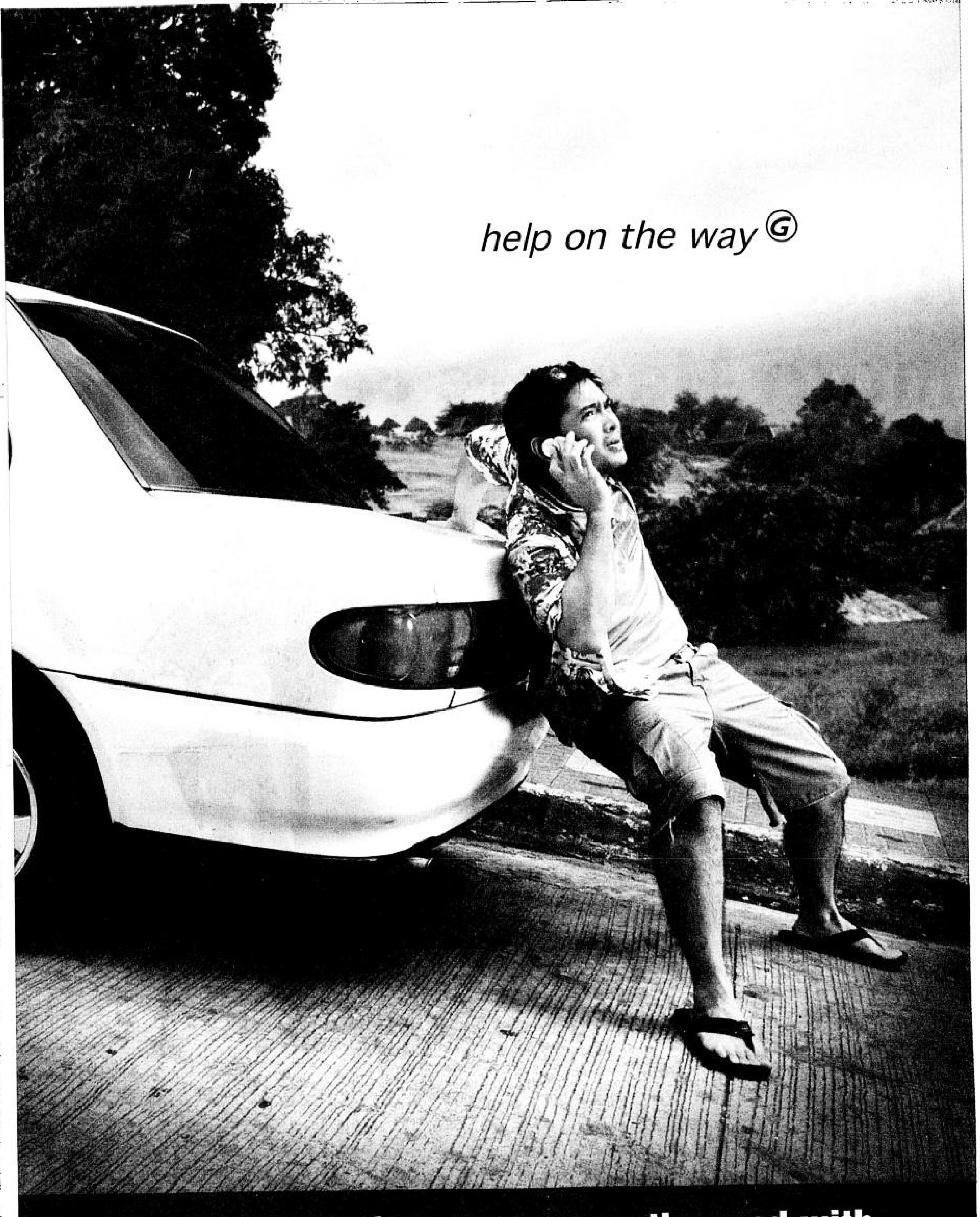
Top amateur

Gopez acknowledged, though, that the 26-year old Pagunsan, the individual gold medal winner in the 2001 Kuala Lumpur SEA Games, may be the top player in the amateur ranks today. But being the best, he said, doesn't automatically give him an outright seeding in the national team.

He said they choose players based on discipline and decorum. "You may be the best, but if you don't have discipline, *wala rin* (it's nothing)."

He stressed there's nothing personal between him and Pagunsan, not even after the player declared recently that he's turning pro—a year earlier than his original plans—due to the shabby treatment he and the other members of the national team were getting from the NGAP.

Gopez said that despite the row, the NGAP has not dropped Pagunsan from the national pool and has instead scheduled him to undergo physical examination Tuesday as part of the nationals' training program.



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A heavyweight secret the Philippines can't afford

BARE EYE

Recah Trinidad

LAS VEGAS—There's a wonder-of-the-world sleeping place inside the vast MGM Grand gambling kingdom that's fit only for the richest among the rich.

It's royal price tag—$20,000 a night—could make even Imelda Marcos, during the height of the dictatorship, think twice before checking in.

Let's call it the One-Million-Peso suite, although it's a lot more elegant, spacious, truly expensive than the ordinary presidential suites occupied by national leaders on official visits.

It's not only big, it's immense, occupying a total of 12,000 square feet of floor space.

It's not available to the plain rich.

Even the members of the rich-and-the-famous will have to be screened if they ever dare stay there.

***

Welcome to the MGM Grand Villa 1, a monument to opulence.

The place, as could only be expected, has its own swimming pool, a front garden, and other amenities available only to the biggest spenders this side of paradise.

Only the boldest of big spenders would dare check into the place.

Anyway, I started asking about the features of the villa after getting a tip that it was rented in the few days leading to the Erik Morales-Manny Pacquiao fight at the MGM Grand Garden Arena here last Saturday.

Why don't you make a guess ("*Hulaan mo?*"), dared a journalist friend, who got the identity of the very special guest from a Filipino staffer of the hotel's VIP reservation section.

I was given five chances to name the mysterious guest.

***

Manny Pacquiao himself, I said. Maybe MGM had agreed to reward him with a royal stay in recognition of his popularity and drawing power.

No, said this journalist friend, Pacquiao stays in a simple $1,000-a-day suite on the 18th floor, courtesy of MGM.

Mike Tyson, he was seen banging the VIP reservation door one early morning, with a young, shapely friend in tow.

Cannot be, Iron Mike is bankrupt.

I can't think of anybody. Bill Gates is not around.

Here, he's a Filipino, said our reluctant informer.

***

Wow, a Filipino? You mean somebody from our poor nation can afford to throw P1 million a night? Incredible.

Another hint, please.

He's a heavyweight backer of Pacquiao.

Chavit Singson, I said, because I had seen the fellow walk into the lobby of MGM in a brown leather jacket.

No, he's a lot, lot bigger than Chavit, besides, no Ilocano in his right mind would squander a million bucks for a sleeping place.

Is he a congressman, one of those who came here to root for Pacquiao?

No, he's a lot bigger than all those solons.

Mayor Lito Atienza, I also saw him around in his regular colorful shirt.

No, Mayor Atienza would rather spend big money to beautify his city.

But why would this big guest spend P1 million just for a room?

Maybe he did not spend his own money. Maybe one sleek operator, who leans on him for big-money deals, rented the room?

***

I gave up. I just couldn't think of any Filipino who could afford a P1-million-a-night hotel suite.

Well, he's no ordinary fellow, my informer said.

Can I just inquire with the desk who this terrific Pinoy is?

No way. In the first place, the villa is something they don't advertise.

Why?

It's very exclusive, very private.

So how would I be able to rent the room if, say, the Sultan of Brunei asks me to register for him?

You have to contact the MGM director of luxury sales.

***

My informer offered to disclose the name of this great guest, but only if his name is not published.

But why should the name of this guest not be made public? He should be proud of his status.

Oh no, it would be very damaging.

What do you mean? Why would sleeping in a P1-million-a-night suite be damaging?

For an answer, my friend whispered in my ears the initials of the mysterious guest.

Bang! Indeed, baring the name of this big, big spender would be a political bombshell.

So you really want to know who the guy is?

Sorry, I'm not at liberty to print the initials whispered in my ears. It's secret.

Just the same, I've saved the text message of a congressman friend who wondered if I could join him at the villa for dinner.

My solon friend has named the villa occupants.

It's an extremely expensive secret the Philippines can't afford.

But what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

Aussie thwarts Aguilar's moto Masters repeat bid

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY—Christian Horwood of Team Camel Supercross-Australia spoiled Glenn Aguilar's repeat bid after an overpowering performance in the final heat of the second Motocross Masters of Asia 2005 FIM-Puerto Princesa International Motocross Championship here.

Aguilar, the Team Philippines Caltex Revtex-Oakley rider, ruled the first heat and actually ended up tied with the Aussie in the overall race with 94 points each.

But Horwood won the leg pennant for topping the final moto, which carried more weight in aggregate scoring.

Aguilar won the first leg of the series held in Guam last month.

Horwood finished second to Aguilar in the first heat and employed the same strategy, but with more success, in the second as he attacked the curves.

The Australian bagged the Mayor Edward Hagedorn Cup, an exquisitely designed silver trophy, for topping the 30-rider international race.

Chaiyan Romphan of Red Bull-Thailand, who wound up fourth and third in the heats, claimed third place (38 points).

Two other title favorites—James Robinson of Team Dickies-New Zealand and Aep Dadang of Team Evalupe-Indonesia—finished fourth and fifth with 35 and 34 points, respectively.

Reigning Thai national Supercross champion Arnon Theplib of Velo-Oil-Honda Thailand wound up sixth with 31 points, followed by former national champion and Team JMS rider Jovie Saulog.

Completing the top 10 finishers were Denny Orlando of Team Pertamina-Indonesia, Motokazu Otsuka of Team Oakley-Japan and Caltex Revtex rider Gabriel "Bebet" de la Cruz.

Meanwhile, FIM jury president Matthew Lee of Singapore congratulated Hagedorn for the successful staging of the event.

The event was sponsored by the Puerto Princesa government, Philippine Olympic Committee, Philippine Sports Commission, the Department of Tourism, Cebu Pacific, Negros Navigation, Dickies, 2Go Aboitiz, HJC Helmets, Oakley, Highland Products, Yehey.com, Motorcyclephilippines.com, Inside Racing, Broadband Philippines, Dusit Hotel, Hotel Asturias, Sports Plus, Caltex Revtex, Asian Spirit and GCG Pipes.

Horwood's performance dashed the hopes of more than 30,000 fans who witnessed the event.

In the second heat, Horwood and Aguilar rode practically side by side in the first three laps. But the Australian champion proved to be much faster in the final stretch. His patience paid off in the seventh lap when he controlled the holeshot for good to bring home the coveted trophy.

Both Horwood, who injured his leg last year, and Aguilar earned similar 47 points for the Puerto Princesa stage.

Despite his runner-up finish, Aguilar remains on track in his bid to reclaim the Asian Motocross crown which he bagged two years ago.

Young Caltex Revtex rider Kenneth San Andres fought hard and finished in 11th place for the leg.

Macau will host the next leg of the FIM-Asian Championship on June 25.

GLENN Aguilar takes the first heat in style. The RP rider still led the series.

Tan Ho gains finals berths in 2 classes

INTERNATIONAL School-Manila bet Joshua Tan Ho posted back-to-back victories yesterday to advance to the boys' 18- and 16-under finals yesterday in the Gov. Muslim Wahab Akbar Age-Group Tennis Championships at the PCA outdoor courts.

Tan Ho, who will banner the national team in the ITF 14-Under Championships in India next week, made it to the 18-under final by downing Christian Canlas, 7-5, 6-2, then clinched his second finals berth with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Leyan Moncera, 6-2, 6-4.

In the boys' 14-under class, Kim Ivor Saraza beat Tim Polero, 7-6, 6-3, to forge a title duel with Akio Sy, who won by default over Patrick Arevalo.

In the girls' division, Michelle Pang downed Margaux Molhant, 6-0, 6-1, and Trudy Amoranto outclassed Zhane Quitara to arrange a championship showdown in the 18-under category.

Amoranto also advanced in the 16-under final following a 6-2, 6-7, 6-3 victory over Christine Patrimonio. She will face Bambi Zoleta, a 6-3, 6-2 winner over Irina Quinatadcan.

In the girls' 12-under class, Regine Santiago clobbered JV Custodio, 6-0, 6-1, to advance to the final against Clarice Patrimonio, who subdued Patricia Oreta, 6-1, 6-2.

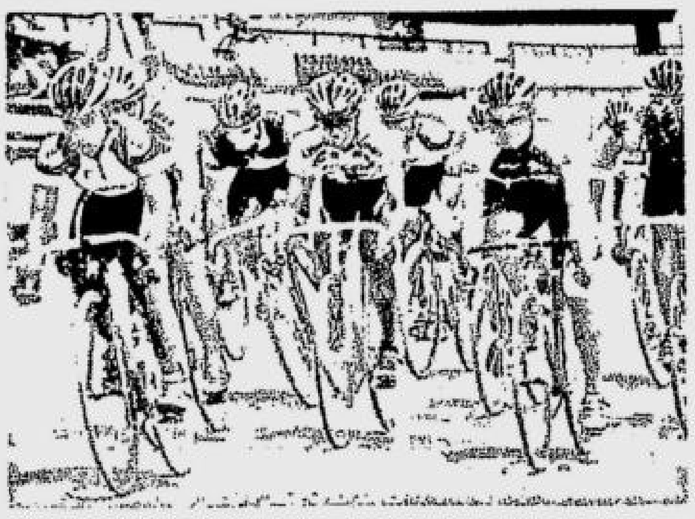
Puerto Princesa hosts Milo netfest

THE PUERTO Princesa Tennis Association will host the third leg of the 2005 Milo Junior Tennis Cup and Regional Workshop on March 26-28.

The tournament, organized by the Children's Tennis Workshop, backed by adidas and sanctioned by Philta, will be held in coordination with club president Boy Dacuan and former club head Imelda Hitosis.

Featured events are the boys' and girls' 18-under, 16-under, 14-under, 12-under and the unisex 10-under divisions.

Estayo, Morales win 2 golds for Tagaytay



ENTRIES set out in the 4,800-m massed start event won by Jan Paul Morales of Tagaytay.

NILO Estayo and Jan Paul Morales put Tagaytay International Convention Center (TICC) in the gold medal column and so did Popo Nagtalon for Quezon City in Day 2 of the First Philippine Velo Challenge yesterday at the Quezon City Amoranto Velodrome.

Estayo, the team skipper, was aggressive and cunning in the Men's Elite Elimination Race, winning one of the two gold medals for Mayor Abraham Tolentino's TICC, which bounced back after a lackluster performance in the opener of the Velo Challenge co-presented by the First Gentleman Foundation of lawyer Jose Miguel Arroyo and Air21 and Tour Pilipinas Inc.

Morales showed promise by ruling the Juniors (under-18) 4,800-meter massed start with a clocking of six minutes and 39.27 seconds for TICC, which shared the day's limelight with MayniLA and Wescor—squads that jostled for the top two in the team competition.

Nagtalon also gave Quezon City its first gold medal in the Women's Elite 4,800-m massed start (8:34.04), beating a star-studded event that included national mainstays Marites Bitbit of Elixir, Lakambini Alto of Puerto Princesa City, Marita Lucas of MayniLA, Mona Valdes of Tagaytay City and Ani Carina de Leon of Wescor.

Elixir bagged just one gold medal for the day—the Olympic Sprint for Executives, Masters and Veterans (Ricardo Maala, Mike Canete and Gerardo Amar)—but with 64 points, still held the lead for team honors in the event also supported primarily by Pagcor and backed by the Philippine Sports Commission, the Philippine Olympic Committee, Isuzu D-Max, Sharp Phils., San Miguel Corp., dzSR Sports Radio, Vittoria Tires, 93.9 iFM, RMN dzXL 558, David's Salon and Intrasports.

MayniLA had three golds to add to the two it won on opening day—Joeffrey Talaver in the Elite Men and Michael Zingh in the Executives of 4,800-m massed start and Olympic Sprint for Juniors, Women and Elite—to shadow Elixir with 59 points.

Expanded Formula-3 racing fires off April 9

THE FIRST two stops of a bigger Asian Formula 3 circuit will be held at the Batangas Racing Circuit on April 9 and 10.

A total of 12 legs will make up the circuit this year with six venues in Asia hosting.

The AF3 returns to the BRC with last year's overall champion Christian Jones of Australia leading the foreign field. AF3 chair Ed Peña said that new rising stars in the international racing scene have been included in the roster of drivers.

"This year's roster is very, very impressive," said Peña of the event backed by Addict Mobile, Motolite, Boysen, Yokohama Tires, Lima City Hotel and PLDT MyDSL.

"After the successful 2004 season, this year's races are expected to be even tougher, especially with the participation of new local and foreign drivers."

From 10 races last year, the new AF3 season will now have an additional two legs with stops set in Zhuhai, China, on May 7-8 and June 18-19, and Sentul, Indonesia, on Aug. 20-21, and Sept 17-18 .

The last two races will return to the Batangas Racing Circuit on Nov. 5 and 6.

John O'hara of Ireland, the runner-up last year, takes another crack at the overall championship. The controversial penalty slapped on him after a neck-and-neck duel with Jones cost him the title.

Most of the returning drivers have admitted they expect to go up against an even tougher field this time with the presence of new local and international drivers testing the Asian circuits.

"If last year's races were tough, the new AF3 season will be even more difficult for the drivers," Peña said.

A number of foreign teams will also make their debuts this year led by the Three Bond Team. Team BRM of Australia also brings its racing expertise to the Asian tracks.

Also back to take a crack at the team championship are Speed Tech Asia, Denso Hanjin FJ3, Fujitsu Team Toms, Team Tec Asia, and Tuason Racing.

"Aside from the individual competition, we're also excited to see the team side of the AF3," Peña said. "If last year's team competition was very tight, we expect to see the teams take the races to the next level."

Carrying the banner for the Philippines are Pepon Marave, the 2003 champion, Tyson Sy, Dado Peña, Enzo Pastor, John Marcelo, Roland Hermoso and JP Tuason.

Marcelo is the younger brother of the late Filipino racer Jovy Marcelo, who died in a crash in an international track during practice several years ago.

Monolith five PCFBL favorite

MONOLITH Construction emerged on top of the leaderboard after nine days of hostilities in the Boysen Paints Cup of the PCFBL-Aces Basketball tournament at the Tanduay Gym in Quiapo, Manila.

Monolith assembled a 4-0 slate with victories over Omni Yatai (93-70), Davies Paints (113-59), Boysen Paints (86-66) and Ironcon Builders (92-82), installing itself as the favorite to win this year's title.

Running second in the month-long tournament are the PCFBL (Philippine-Chinese Friendship Basketball League) Selection, Boysen Paints and Ironcon Builders with identical 3-1 win-loss records.

PCFBL's lone defeat was inflicted by RBT-Techwerk, 79-96, during the opening of the tournament last Feb. 27 while Boysen Paints and Ironcon were both beaten by Monolith Construction.

Third placer RBT-Techwerk holds a 3-2 record. Techwerk beat PCFBL but suffered back-to-back setbacks against Boysen Paints (85-98) and Ironcon (129-124) before annexing two wins over Alpha 7 (108-102) and Welcoat Paints (102-93).

Welcoat Paints follows Techwerk in the team standings. Welcoat's two triumphs were against Alpha 7 (104-97) and Davies Paints (107-87).

In four games, Davies Paints managed to show only one win by defeating lowly Omni Yatai, 105-90.

Alpha 7 and Omni Yatai are the only teams in the field with no victory to show in four outings.

Guidicelli, 3 hot recruits power CRG

REIGNING Karter of the Year Matteo Guidicelli and three new recruits debuted in impressive style for the Cebu Racing Group (CRG) in the 2005 Shell Superkarting series at the Carmona Circuit Philippines recently.

Guidicelli, Ivan Carapiet, John Alvarez and Vencer Jon Suba all dished out excellent performances in their respective categories as the team took off to a strong start.

Michelle Bumgarner ruled the ICA Open and Marlon Stockinger triumphed in the Formula Rotax Men's seniors where Guidicelli fought it out tooth and nail before settling for fourth- and second-place finishes in the heats.

In a down-the-wire duel with Bumgarner, Guidicelli spun out in the last curve after the eventual winner clipped his kart and damaged its right axle.

"It was clear that Michele knew where I was because she hit me from behind," said Guidicelli, son of a Filipina and an Italian based in Cebu. "We lost this race, but it's still a long season, and I can still catch up."

In the Formula Rotax, Stockinger slipped past Guidicelli and Marcel Thenu in the final straight for the win.

Despite the runner-up finish, Guidicelli, who is backed by Addict Mobile Prepaid, Swatch, Penshoppe and Oakley, still leads the Formula Rotax series.

Carapiet shared the limelight, rallying to fourth spot from the back of the pack before a broken bumper forced him out in the middle of the 10-lap race.

swatch
PENSHOPPE
CRG
GUIDICELLI leads the Formula Rotax series.

Alvarez, meanwhile, made a big jump from seventh to second aboard an all-new kart in just his first full competitive season.

Suba, the 10-year-old son of CRG chief mechanic Sonny, also had a remarkable debut, leading the Cadet 60 Novice race before dropping out after smashing into a back marker.

The second leg is set April 2-3 at the Boomland Kart Track on Roxas Boulevard.

RACING TIPS

AT SLLP BY MR. 999

Race 1—1. Material Maker 2. Double Your Bet/Uncle 3. Paradise 4. Reason to Believe
Race 2—1. Ocean Wings 2. Voice of Destiny 3. No Compromise 4. Pleyer's Twist
Race 3—1. Pangako Sa Yo 2. My Aday 3. Dulce My Love 4. Express Strike
Race 4—1. Big Bucks 2. She Boom 3. Tony's Secret 4. Richie Rich
Race 5—1. Chelseasmile 2. Besame Mulcho 3. Medal's Time
Race 6—1. Caballero 2. Saving Grace 3. Mr. Bonjing 4. Vice Free
Race 7—1. Tool Pusher 2. Western Dancer 3. Golden Harry 4. Lucky Beat
Race 8—1. Order of Merit 2. Smarty Jude 3. Fly Aday Fly 4. Longshot Tony
Race 9—1. Tiger Winnie 2. Lady Be Gold 3. Heart of the Wind 4. Freedom Bell 5. West Swinger 6. Mandalay Bay

30 teams join 1st Jungolf kickoff

AT least 30 teams from all over the country are seeing action in the first Jungolf National Club Championship, the kick-off leg of the Samsung Amateur Tour slated March 28-30 at the Malarayat and Camp Aguinaldo courses.

Jungolfers will represent clubs, schools and organizations in the two-division tournament.

Players in the special division and classes A and B will compete in Division I, while those in classes C, D and E will vie for honors in Division II. Format will be a four-to-play, three-to-count.

After the club event, jungolfers will motor to Baguio City for a Ryder Cup-type competition. The first day will follow the alternate shot format, with the second day shifting to best ball scramble. The third and final day will be singles play.

"The objective is to expose the kids to different formats and make the competition more exciting. We made sure that the two teams are evenly matched," said Jungolf president Raoul Lachica.

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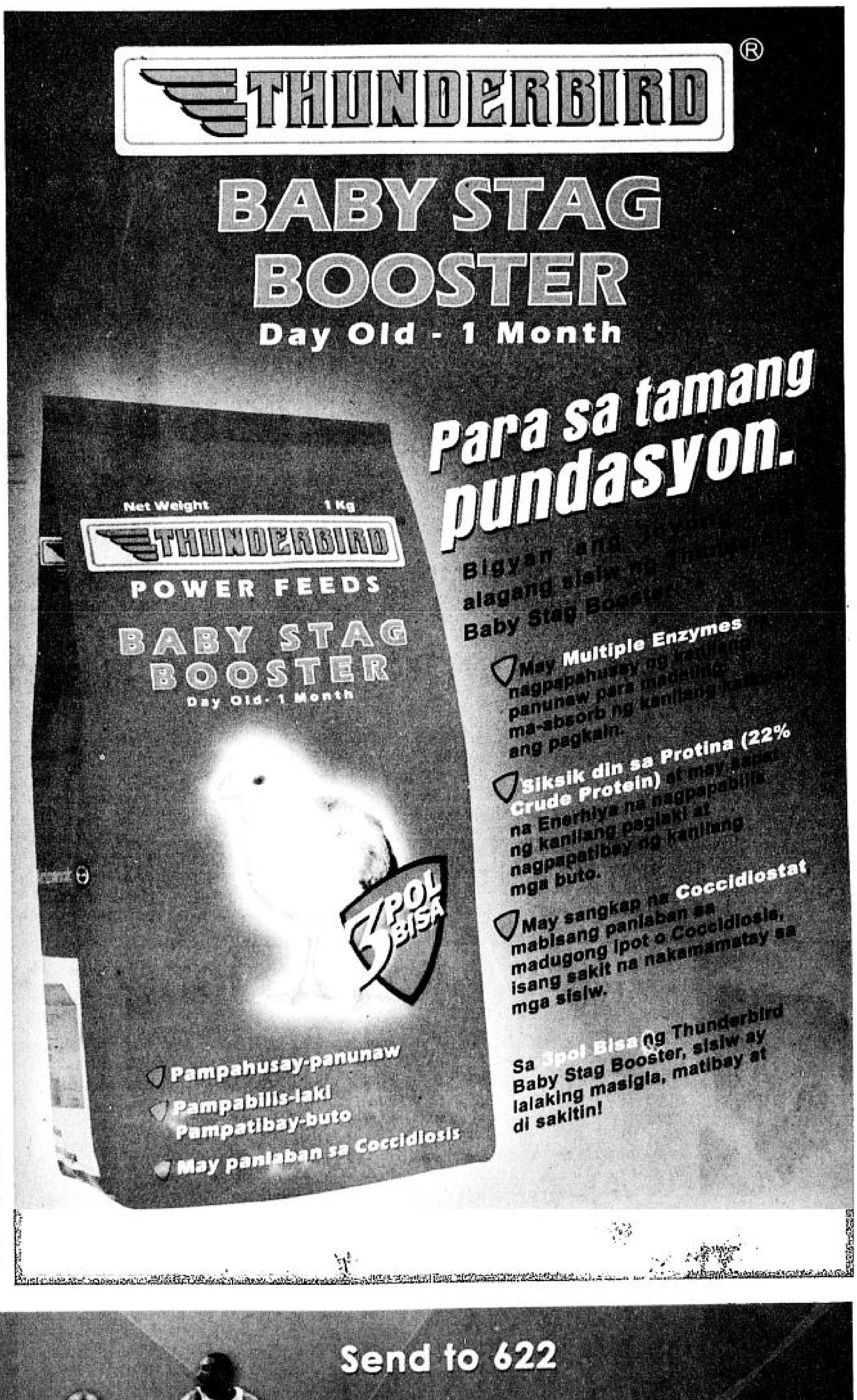
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May sangkap na Coccidiostat mabisang panlaban sa madugong ipot o Coccidiosis, isang sakit na nakamamatay sa mga sisiw.
Sa 3pol Bisa ng Thunderbird Baby Stag Booster, sisiw ay lalaking masigla, matibay at di sakitin!

Rafols, Pilapil dominate Cagayan-North Aquathlon

NATIONAL triathlon swimming coach Loi Rafols and Josephine Pilapil dominated the field to claim top honors in the Cagayan-North aquathlon over the weekend at the San Vicente Naval Operating Base in the town.

Rafols, a Philippine Navy enlisted man, took command in the 1-kilometer swim, held his ground in the 2-K beach run before breaking away in the 5-K run to take the overall championship with a time of 58:57 minutes.

John Omar Paredes, the swimming coach of UP-Los Baños, checked in second with a time of 1:00:11, more than two minutes ahead of the third-placed Jerimiah Tambok (1:02:31).

The 17-year-old Pilapil, the 2003 national champion, checked in with a time of 1:02:28—beaten only by Rafols and Paredes—to win the women's title pulling away.

"I built my lead in the swim, especially the grind back where the waves were enormous," said Rafols in Filipino. "It provided me the cushion for the run."

The event was supposed to be held at the Anguib beach in Sta. Ana, but bad weather forced the organizers to move the venue to SVNOB.

Organizers led by Cagayan Gov. Edgar Lara and Cagayan Economic Zone Authority CEO Jose Mari Ponce thanked Commodore Salvador Padua, SVNOB commanding officer, for hosting the races.

Scores of participants, including members of the national triathlon and kayaking teams, took part in the event sponsored by Ceza, Speedo, PowerBar, Asian Center for Insulation, San Miguel Beer, Smart, Optima Drinking Water, POC-Sports for All Commission, and LGU's Aparri, Sta. Ana and the provincial government of Cagayan.

Classic Cup at stake in Ateneo-La Salle golf

MORE than 500 golfers are expected to play for their respective schools in the hunt for the Classic Cup, the overall trophy to be awarded to the winning side in this year's Ateneo-La Salle dual meet on April 4 at the Eagle Ridge Golf and Country Club in Gen. Trias, Cavite.

The Classic Cup replaces the Ambassador Valdes Trophy which La Salle permanently put away after its three straight wins from 2001.

This year's Ateneo-La Salle golf, sponsored by PLDT and Smart, is actually a two-in-one event. The Challenge Division features alumni and students playing for their respective schools, while the Fellowship Division is disputed by teams composed of a golfer each from the opposing sides.

The organizers as well as PLDT and Smart have agreed to set aside part of the sponsorship deal for scholarship grants to two students—one in each school—starting this school year.

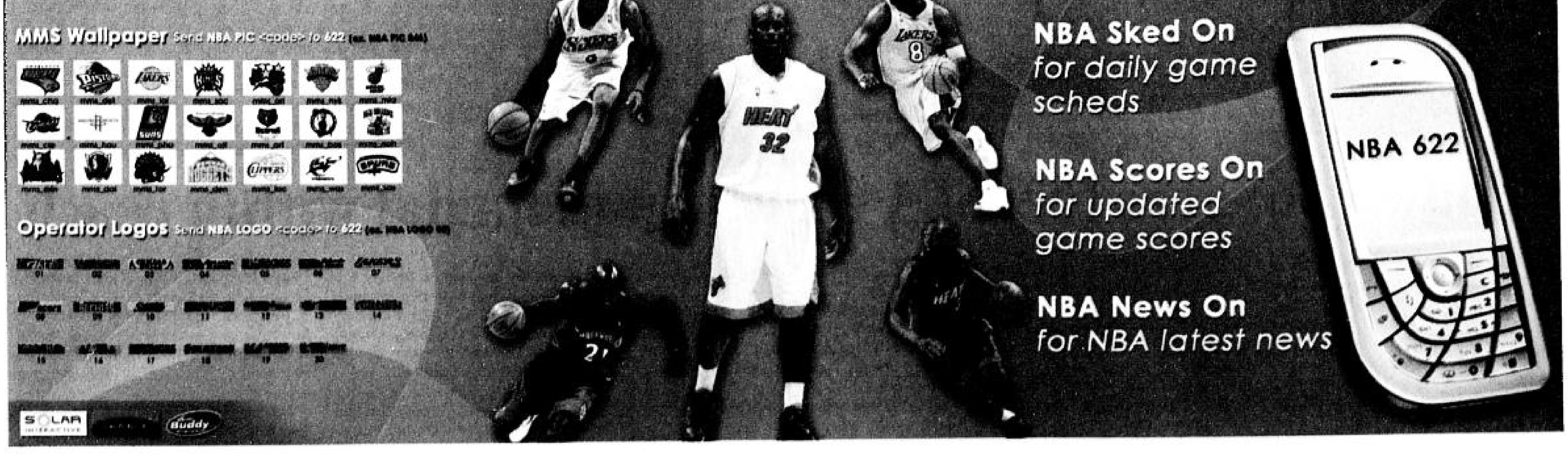
"We believe that this scholarship grant will add a new meaning and a redeeming value to the Ateneo-La Salle tourney," said Ateneo Golf Foundation head Iggy Clavecilla.

"It's long overdue. This offer from PLDT-Smart is definitely a welcome boost and we're very much for it," said La Salle alumni president Lito Tanjuatco.

Preceding the tourney is a separate seniors competition for players 60 years and above on April 1 at the Alabang Country Club.

Smart and PLDT will be offering other services never before seen in the whole history of the event. Each participant will receive complimentary golf clinic and instructional DVDs by Smart endorser Jennifer Rosales, customized SIM designs with their respective school logos and customized number series for alumni.

For inquiries, call the alumni affairs offices at Ateneo (426-6081) and La Salle (523-6158/526-5612).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NBA Scores On for updated game scores
NBA News On for NBA latest news

Knicks' Rose a thorn against former team

NEW YORK—Malik Rose knocked down a pair of 18-foot jumpers to complete a 14-0 run to start the fourth quarter, getting a measure of revenge against the team that traded him last month as the New York Knicks defeated the San Antonio Spurs, 88-75, Monday night.

Rose had 18 points—his most since joining the Knicks 10 games ago—and seven rebounds against the team he spent the past 7 1/2 seasons with. Rose was making his first start for New York as Kurt Thomas was sidelined by an infected elbow.

Stephon Marbury scored the Knicks' final 14 points of the third quarter and finished with 31 points and 10 assists.

New York, trying to keep its slim playoff hopes alive, gained a game on fading Orlando and pulled within 3 1/2 games of eighth-place Philadelphia in the Eastern Conference standings with 17 games remaining.

Devin Brown scored 22 points for the Spurs, who were without Tim Duncan (sprained ankle).

Bobcats 102, Magic 97

In Charlotte, Brevin Knight hit a running jumper with 12.4 seconds to play to help Charlotte end a 10-game losing streak.

Knight finished with 19 points, eight assists and three steals, and Emeka Okafor had 17 points and 13 rebounds for the expansion Bobcats. Grant Hill led Orlando with 25 points and Dwight Howard, the No. 1 overall pick in the NBA draft, had 21 points and 13 rebounds.

The Magic played without Steve Francis, who was suspended three games by the NBA on Monday for kicking a photographer last week. He served the first game of the suspension on Saturday before the league told him he had to sit out two more.

Bulls 105, Hawks 91

In Chicago, Eddy Curry scored 24 points in his return to Chicago's lineup and Ben Gordon added 17 in the Bulls' victory over Atlanta.

Curry, the 6-foot-11 (2.11-meter) center who missed the Bulls' previous three games because of a strained left hamstring, was 8-of-13 from the field and 8-of-9 from the line.

Kirk Hinrich added 12 points and 10 assists for Chicago, and Othella Harrington had 10 points.

Josh Smith led the Hawks with 16 points, Al Harrington had 15, and Tyronn Lue added 14 points and eight assists. The Hawks, an NBA-worst 11-55, have lost five straight and 18 of their last 19 games.

Mavericks 103, Hornets 86

In Dallas, Dirk Nowitzki had 25 points and eight rebounds, and rookie Devin Harris added a season-high 17 points as Dallas beat New Orleans in Avery Johnson's second game as the Mavericks' head coach.

The Mavericks have won both games since Johnson took over for Don Nelson on Saturday and have victories in five of their last six overall.

Michael Finley added 16 points and Josh Howard had 15 for Dallas.

Rookie J.R. Smith had a season-high 27 points and Jamaal Magliore added 13 points and 12 rebounds for the Hornets, who have lost six of eight.

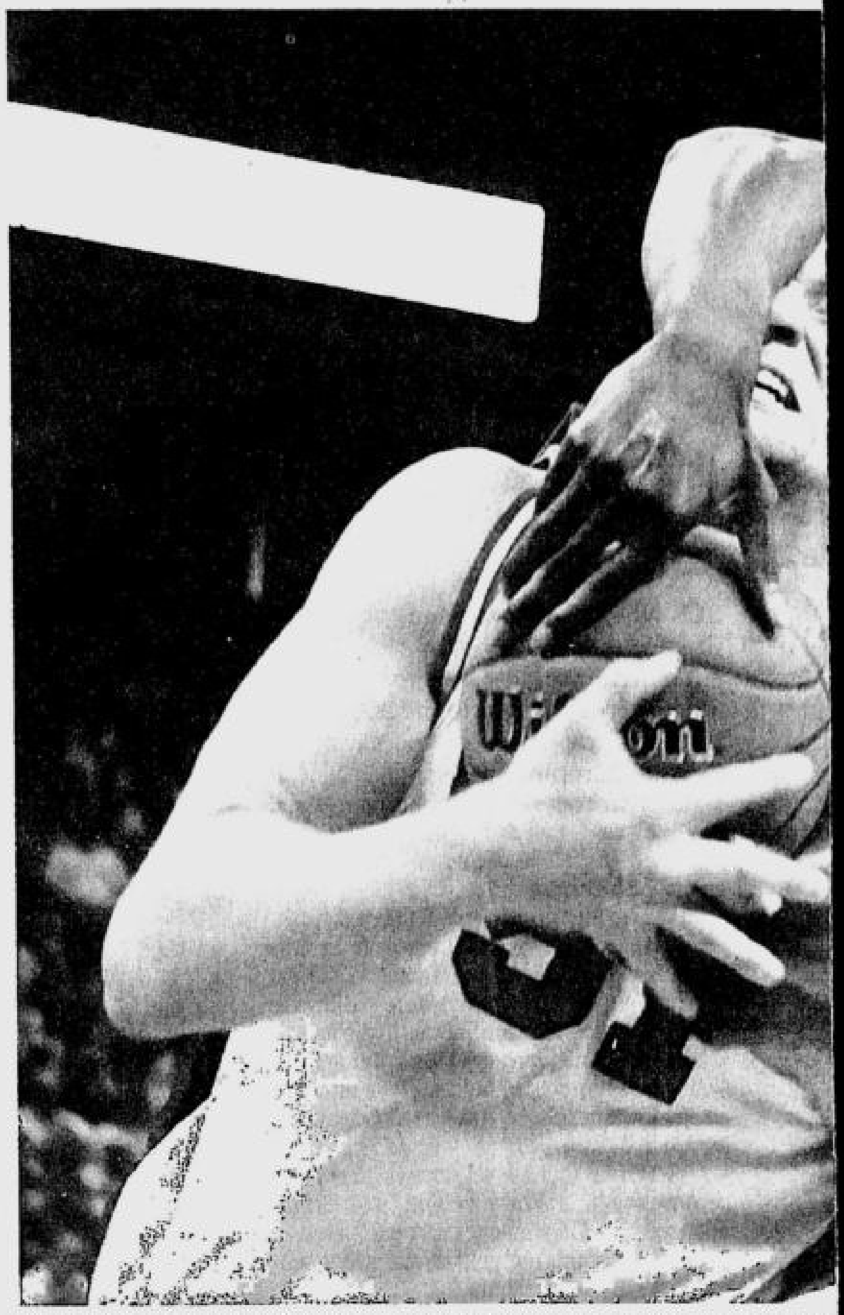
Clippers 96, Trail Blazers 89

In Los Angeles, Elton Brand and Corey Maggette each scored 22 points as Los Angeles beat Portland.

The Clippers had a season-high 13 blocks—six off the franchise record. Bobby Simmons had 15 points for Los Angeles, which reached the 30-win mark for just the fourth time in the last 12 seasons.

After playing eight of their previous nine games against clubs currently holding down a playoff spot, the Clippers salvaged a 2-2 split of the season series in a match-up of teams heading to the NBA lottery.

Shareef Abdur-Rahim had 23 points and 14 rebounds and Darius Miles added 20 points for the injury-ravaged Trail Blazers (23-42), whose fifth straight loss assured them of their first losing season since 1988-89 (39-43) and just the fourth since the franchise won its only NBA title in 1976-77. *AP*



NORTH Carolina's Marvin Williams, right, reaches for possession over Iowa S
expected to heat up several notches more with the Sweet 16 coming up.

Cleveland ditches Silas

CLEVELAND—Paul Silas was fired as coach of the Cleveland Cavaliers on Monday with his team fighting for an NBA playoff spot after leading its division earlier this year.

Long-time NBA assistant Brendan Malone will be the interim coach.

Silas told The Associated Press he was informed at a morning meeting with general manager Jim Paxson and new owner Dan Gilbert. Silas' son, assistant Stephen Silas, also was fired.

"They didn't think the team was performing as well as it should be and they wanted to make a change," Paul Silas said.

Despite superstar LeBron James, fellow All-Star Zydrunas Ilgauskas, and a veteran bench, the Cavaliers have struggled since the All-Star break last month. They have lost nine of 12 and nine straight road games, including Sunday's 105-98 loss to Toronto when James scored a franchise-record 56 points.

"We believe in our players, and that progress just wasn't being made," Paxson said at a news conference on Monday. "We have 18 games left in this season. We're fifth in the Eastern Conference right now, and we felt that if we didn't make this decision that we were jeopardizing our ability to be a playoff team this year."

The Cavaliers entered the All-Star break at 30-21, then went into a slide, the decline marked by personnel issues.

The trouble may have culminated on Sunday when Silas benched starting guard Jeff McInnis and replaced him with Eric Snow. Snow did not score in Cleveland's loss at Toronto, and McInnis, despite being dressed and available, didn't play.

This season, Silas threw Snow off the bench after the two exchanged words during the first quarter at Detroit, a move that stunned the team because of Snow's reputation as a leader.

Last week, Silas was fined $10,000 by the team for a derogatory comment he made about Utah Jazz forward Carlos Boozer. *AP*

AP

SILAS: Headaches began after All-Star break.

Federer simply too

INDIAN WELLS, California—After he turned pro in 1998, Roger Federer fretted about his poor track record in finals.

But with a remarkable run of 17 consecutive wins in finals he has appeared in, the only thing the world No. 1 worries about these days is setting new records.

"I didn't have a great record in the beginning of my career in finals," said the Swiss superstar, who beat Lleyton Hewitt in the final of the Indian Wells Masters Series event on Sunday. "I lost more than I won."

"I remember I had a good record in finals in juniors. I was very disappointed to have a bad one in the beginning of my pro career.

"Somehow, I turned it around. To come through here is very special, especially in my first Masters Series of the year."

Indeed, Federer earned his seventh title in his last eight tournaments dating back to the US Open.

When Marat Safin upset Federer to win the Australian earlier this year, it sparked talk of a rivalry among the top four players in the world—Federer, Safin, Hewitt and Andy Roddick.

But the 23-year-old Federer showed once again on Sunday just how huge the gap is by dismantling No. 2 Hewitt in straight sets.

A bewildered Hewitt could only

Francis suspended three more days

NEW YORK—Orlando guard Steve Francis was suspended three games without pay by the National Basketball Association here Monday for kicking a photographer.

The ban came two days after the league suspended him indefinitely over the weekend while investigating the incident, which took place with 8:57 remaining in Friday's 99-90 loss at Seattle.

Francis served the first game of his suspension Saturday, when the Magic ended a seven-game losing streak with a 97-92 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers.

Francis, who leads the Magic with 21.4 points and 6.9 assists a game, will miss two games against first-year expansion club Charlotte, on the road Monday and at home Thursday.

Former NBA bad boy Dennis Rodman was suspended 11 games for kicking a cameraman in 1997, but Francis—among the NBA technical fouls leaders—does not have the poor behavior history Rodman did.

Francis, in his sixth season and first with Orlando, has been replaced in the starting lineup by rookie Jameer Nelson.

The suspension continues a tumultuous week for the Magic, fighting Philadelphia for the final Eastern Conference playoff spot.

Forward Stacey Augmon was suspended one game by the NBA for squirting lotion on reporters after a loss on March 13. *AFP*

Singh: No. 1 no longer big deal

SINGH AP

WOODS REUTERS

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Florida—Vijay Singh spent two years pursuing his goal of being No. 1 in the world, finally reaching the top thanks to hard work and 11 victories in 22 months on the US PGA Tour.

Returning to the top the second time around wasn't nearly as meaningful.

As he walked off the 18th green at the Bay Hill Invitational, where the wrong club at the wrong time cost him a chance to win for the second straight week, Singh didn't even realize he had replaced Tiger Woods at No. 1.

Nor did he care.

"I didn't think I got it back, did I?" he said. "Well, big deal. I lost the tournament."

Even during his first reign that lasted 26 weeks, it didn't take Singh long to realize that No. 1 is just a number. More important are the trophies, especially green jackets and claret jugs.

He earned it the first time around by going head-to-head with Woods in the final round of the Deutsche Bank Championship. Tied for the lead with five holes to play, Singh held him off and won by three, ending Woods' five-year run at the top.

"I've worked pretty hard for this," Singh said that day outside Boston. "I finally achieved what I wanted to do at the beginning of the year."

Singh returned to No. 1 in the world on Sunday under entirely different circumstances—he hit a 7-iron into the water on the final hole at Bay Hill to make double bogey and finish two shots behind Kenny Perry.

No wonder Singh cared so little about a title that once meant so much.

"It's all about winning," Woods said. "I'm sure he (Singh) feels the same way. If you win a bunch of tournaments each and every year, the rankings will follow."

The battle for No. 1 probably will continue the rest of the year, certainly for the next month.

Woods has been No. 1 longer than anyone—336 weeks—since the world rankings began in 1986, and he can get it back this week at The Players Championship.

So can Ernie Els, who hasn't been No. 1 since 1998.

By the end of the year, Phil Mickelson and Retief Goosen might have a chance to reach the pinnacle. Chances are, it will be more meaningful at that point to them than to Singh or Woods.

Mickelson is the best player to have never been No. 1 in the world, with 25 victories and a major title last year at the US Masters. The ranking is measured over two years, and he hasn't allowed himself much thought on what kind of achievement that would be, other than to say, "It would be cool."

Els has been No. 1 on three occasions—for one week after winning the 1997 US Open, then for eight out of nine weeks the following year when Woods started to change his swing.

"That's one of the goals—obviously to win major championships, but I'd love to be No. 1," Els said. *AP*

UNRETIRED

Julio Cesar Chavez of Culiacan, Mexico, left, and challenger Ivan Robinson pose at a news conference announcing their super lightweight bout. The bout is billed as three-time world champion Chavez's final fight in the United States. AP

Mitsubishi tennis unfolds March 28

THE 16TH edition of the Mitsubishi Lancer International Junior netfest unfolds next week with hopes of producing another Andy Roddick or Lleyton Hewitt.

"We're very proud that the world's current tennis stars had, at sometime in the past, been part of this tournament," said Mitsubishi Motors' assistant vice president for marketing services, Froilan Dytianquin, yesterday.

Roddick, the current golden boy of American tennis, and former world No. 1 Hewitt ruled this meet in separate instances in the 1990s as junior players.

"We hope to do it again this year," added Dytianquin in launching the event that starts March 28.

Boys and girls coming from Australia, Austria, Canada, China, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, Korea, the United States, the Philippines, among others, are entered in the event at the Rizal Memorial hard courts.

Maricris Fernandez' victory in 1995 still stands as the last time the Philippines won the event.

RP lawn bowlers feel SEA Games gold medal within reach

THE MEMBERS of the Philippine Lawn Balls Association national squad are confident of contributing to the country's gold medal machine in the coming Southeast Asian Games.

Funded by giant food conglomerate San Miguel Corp., the team has had extensive international exposure and is banking on the home court edge in its bid to improve on the two-silver and three-bronze haul from the 2001 Kuala Lumpur Games.

"We are very grateful for the support that San Miguel has extended to us," said Ronalyn Greenlees, president of the PLBA in the weekly PSA Forum at the Manila Pavilion yesterday.

"SMC's sponsorship gives us confidence that the country can produce its first SEA Games gold medal in lawn bowls," added Greenlees.

RP coach Peter O' Donnell, who also appeared with Greenlees and team manager Chito Loyzaga in the public sports program sponsored by Red Bull, Supermax, Circure and PAGCOR, said the Filipino lawn bowlers are right on target in their quest for a gold medal as they have been rigorously competing non-stop against some of the top players in both Asia and the world.

He cited the seventh place finish—the highest among Asian countries—of both the men and women's teams in the last World Championship in Scotland.

Making up the 12-man team to this year's SEA Games are Christopher Dagpin, Angelo Morales, Herminio Dagpin, Ronald Lising, Leoncio Carreon Jr. and Reynaldo Samia in the men's side.

Greenlees, Carmen Bestel Anderson, a four-time gold medalist in the Asia-Pacific Championships, Rosita Bradborn, Asuncion Bruce, Amy Gardoce and Milagros Witheridge compose the women's class.

"We expect the players to be in peak form come the SEA Games," said Loyzaga.

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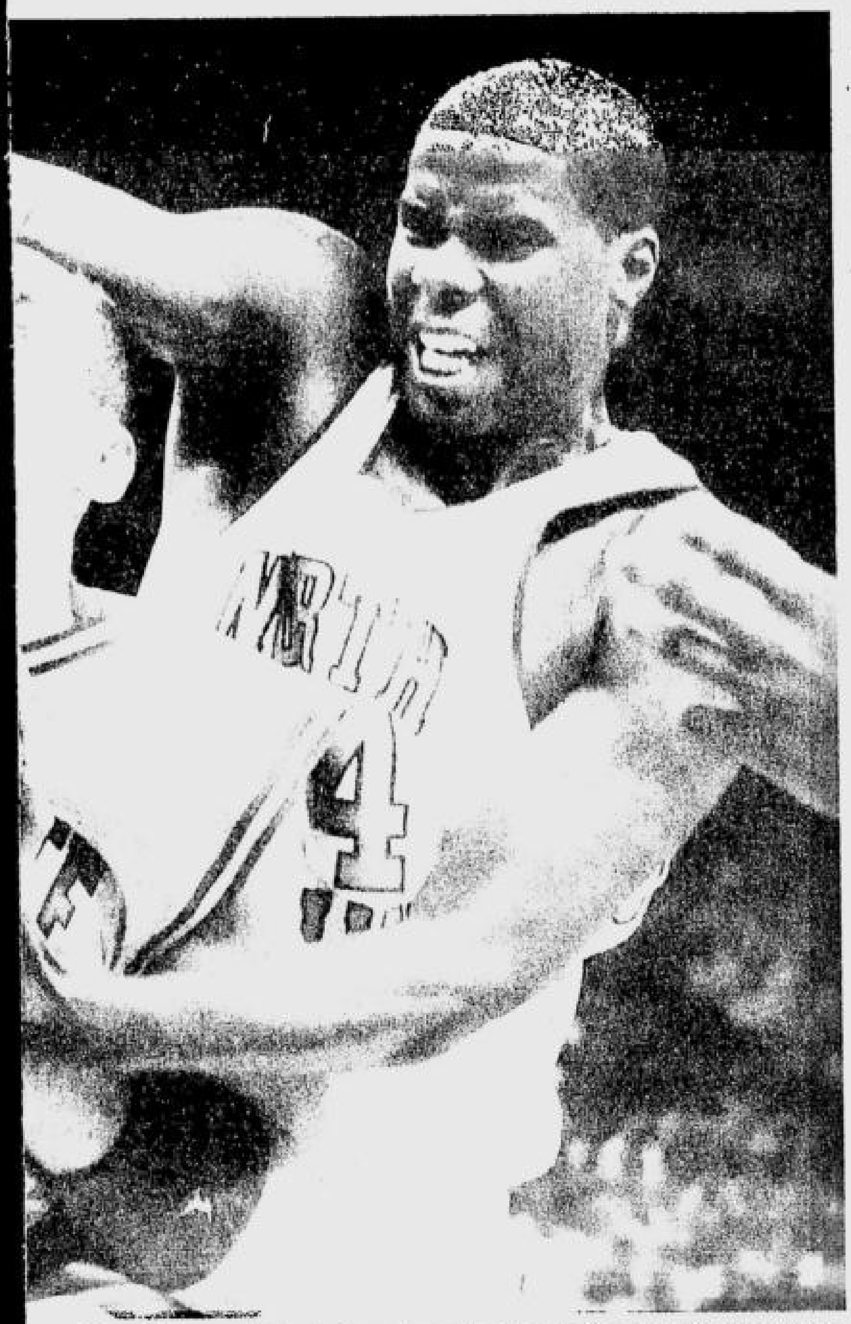

tate's Jared Homan in their second round game. College basketball action is

AP

good for his rivals

stand on center court and scratch his head after losing to Federer for the seventh straight time, including the 2004 US Open final.

"It is not like he's doing something freaky out there," Australian Hewitt said.

"If you want to be the best player in the world you've got to look at where the benchmark is and he's set it pretty high right at the moment."

American tennis fans have finally started to warm up to Federer and are coming to realize his Tiger Woods-like dominance is something to marvel at.

He and Hewitt were given a standing ovation by the Indian Wells crowd after a stunning 45-shot rally in which the point was eventually won by the Aussie.

"You don't normally get a standing ovation," Hewitt said. "Maybe after you win a Davis Cup final or something. Not normally after a point, especially when both of you are not from America."

Asked if there is any unfinished business to take care of this year besides defending the 11 titles he won last year, Federer said he looks forward to the challenge of playing in the French Open which begins May 23.

"You have tournaments close to your heart," Federer said. "Other ones you want to win. Definitely it would be nice to win the French and complete, I would say, the Grand Slam." *AFP*

adies ice up rmoc cling

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ppine representative to the In-
nal Mountain Bicycling Asso-
IMBA).

Utah star draws NCAA spotlight

LAS VEGAS—There are times when Andrew Bogut acts like the tallest point guard in the United States, and other times when he's merely the most dominating inside presence in the US college basketball championship tournament.

National Basketball Association executives salivate when his name is mentioned, though you'd be hard-pressed to find many basketball fans east of the Rocky Mountains who knew much about him only a few weeks ago.

Without Bogut, the University of Utah wouldn't even be playing this time of year, much less have an outside chance of making the NCAA tournament Final Four. He's a superstar who just happens to need four other players on the court with him.

"I think all his teammates understand they're probably very fortunate to be playing with him," Utah coach Ray Giacoletti said during a telephone interview Monday.

Observers believe if Bogut isn't everybody's player of the year, something is wrong with the balloting. If he's not the first pick in the NBA draft in June, some general manager is sleeping.

This is a 2.14-meter (7-foot) Australian so gifted that even his coach isn't telling him to come back for his junior and senior years.

"He's going to make a lot of money for a lot of years," Giacoletti said.

Bogut will make that money because he's one of those players who can dominate in different ways without having much in the way of a supporting cast.

It showed on Saturday in Tucson, Arizona, when Bogut tied his season low with 10 points yet still managed to lead the Utes to a win over Oklahoma and a berth in the regional semifinals Friday against Kentucky.

The Sooners wanted to push Bogut around and beat him up in the low post, so Bogut switched to the high post and acted like a point guard. He was credited with seven assists, and he also managed to grab 11 rebounds.

"He really has operated as a point guard all year," Giacoletti said. "Sometimes people just see he leads the country in double doubles. But every time he touches the ball something good happens for our team."

Bogut made his way to Utah after former coach Rick Majerus recruited him from a distance. He had a decent freshman year, then blossomed on the Australian national team in the Olympics when he matched up well against the United States' Tim Duncan.

He was entertaining some pro offers from European teams when Giacoletti flew to Australia to talk him into playing with the Utes at least one more year.

Bogut says he'll wait until the season ends to discuss leaving for the NBA. But, with possible top-pick money awaiting, it's a foregone conclusion he has only a few games left with the Utes.

His next game likely will have him out on the high post again, hoping his supporting cast can play a good game of catch and shoot.

"I really like to find guys in the open," Bogut said. "I get a thrill out of throwing a good pass to a guy that scores." *AP*

Sorenstam trains sights on majors

PHOENIX, Arizona—Annika Sorenstam goes into this week's Kraft Nabisco Championship, the first of the year's four women's majors, high on confidence after retaining her Safeway International title in Phoenix, Arizona on Sunday.

The world No. 1 edged out Mexico's Lorena Ochoa in a playoff at Superstition Mountain to clinch the 58th title of her career, her fourth in a row on the LPGA Tour and her second this year.

"I've had a great start to the season and this is certainly a great build-up for a major," said the 34-year-old Swede, who won consecutive Nabisco titles in 2001 and 2002.

"Majors are the goal and I think it is possible to win four in one year. It's never been done but I always set myself high targets.

"It was my goal last year and I lost a little momentum when I didn't win Nabisco."

Sorenstam was disappointed when she fell at that first hurdle. She went on to win just one major last year, the LPGA Championship, to lift her career tally to seven.

"But now I'm ready for a big week," she added. "I love the Mission Hills course and just can't wait to get there.

"I know I'm putting myself under a lot of pressure (eyeing a calendar grand slam this year), but that's the way I like it."

Few would disagree with a player who has totally dominated women's golf over the last four years and shows no sign of slowing down.

She filed for divorce from her husband, David Esch, last month, but says the upheaval in her personal life has made her even more focused on the golf course.

"I feel I'm in the best form ever at this stage of the year and I'm just so excited about the rest of the season," she said.

Sorenstam conceded she had been fortunate to win at Superstition Mountain after a dramatic late collapse by Ochoa, who had led by four strokes with three holes to play.

The Mexican, however, double-bogeyed 16 and dropped another shot on 17 to give Sorenstam a chance to draw level as she played the last.

The Swede produced one of the best shots of her career at the 508-yard 18th, hitting a brilliant four-wood second 240 yards that finished 20 feet from the pin. *Reuters*

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Your long drive round the summer hotspots this Holy Week can lead to a breakdown. That's why NISSAN Summer Service crews have been posted at strategic points to help you out. So you can be back on the road in no time.

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GIVE YOUR CAR THAT JUST SERVICED FEELING

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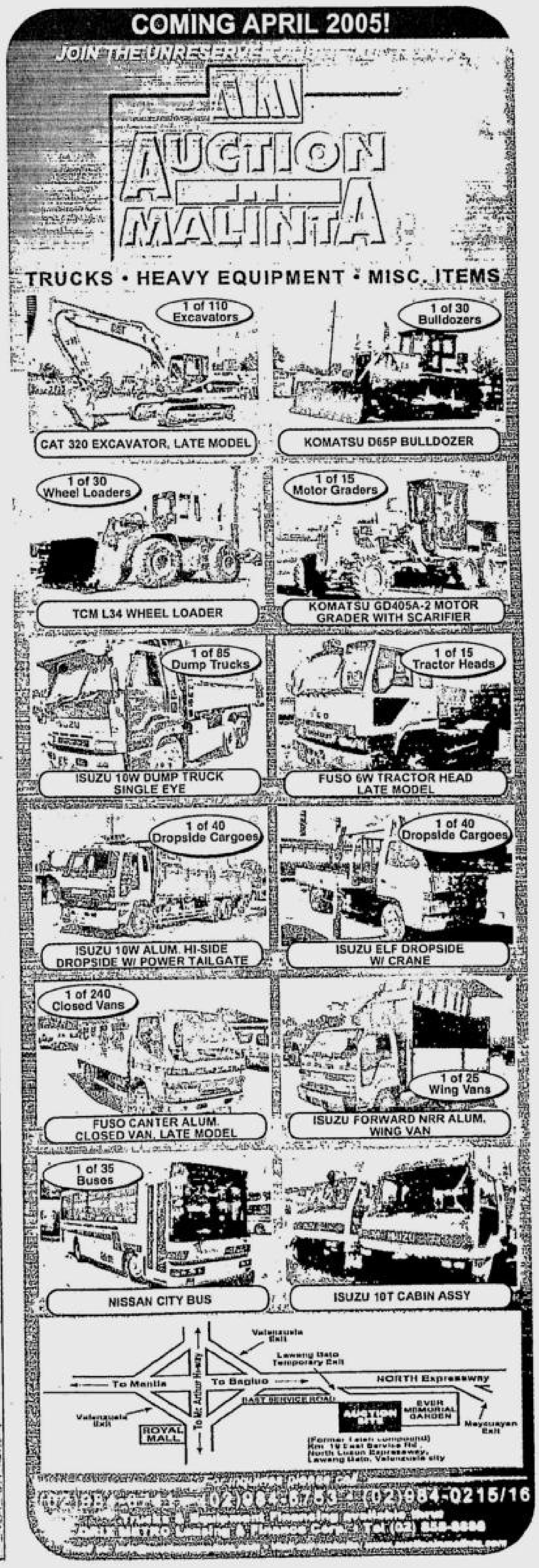
SEE YOU ON APRIL 2005!

MICROVAN



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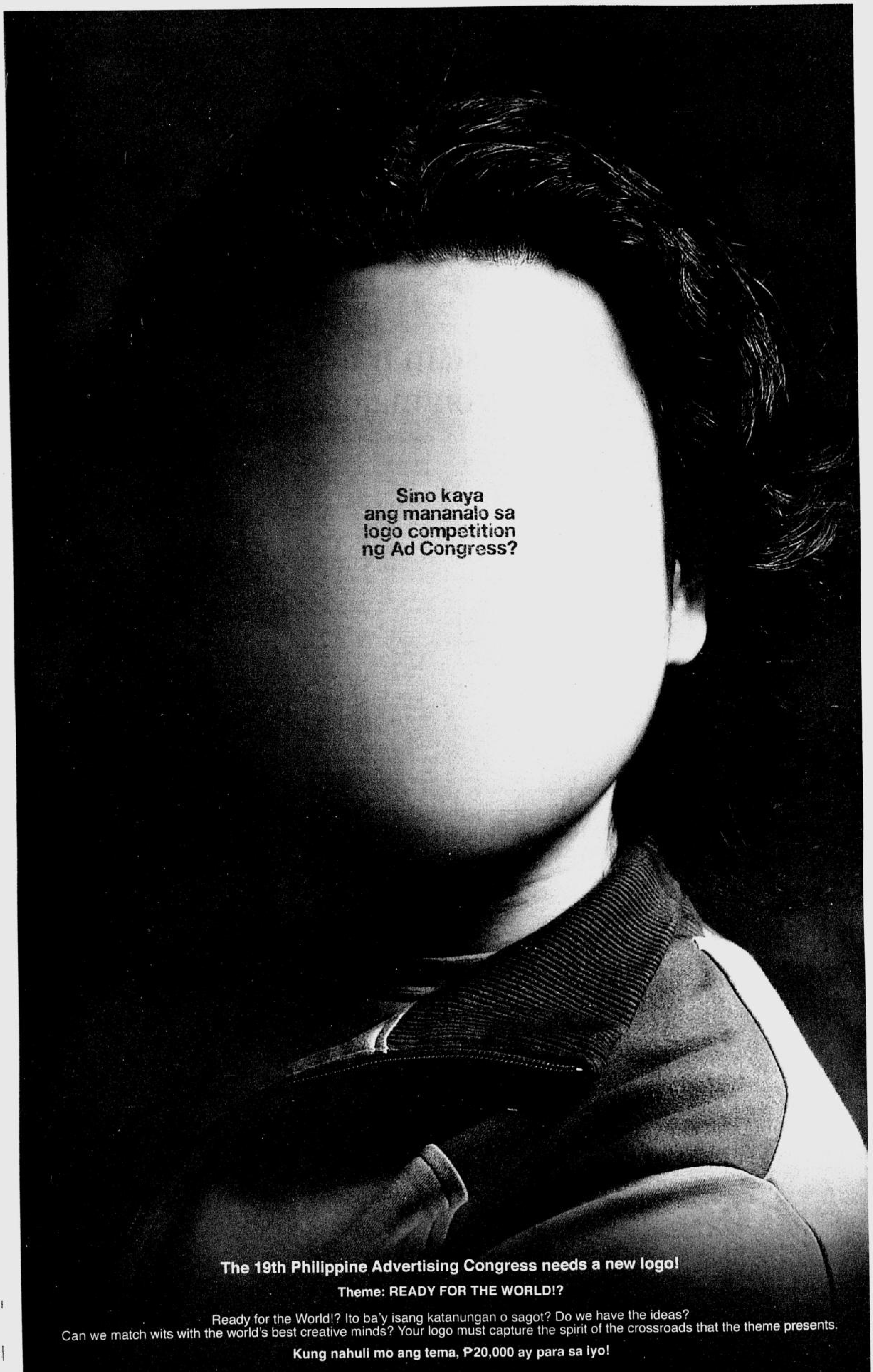


The 19th Philippine Advertising Congress needs a new logo!

Theme: READY FOR THE WORLD!?

Ready for the World!? Ito ba'y isang katanungan o sagot? Do we have the ideas?
Can we match wits with the world's best creative minds? Your logo must capture the spirit of the crossroads that the theme presents.

Kung nahuli mo ang tema, ₱20,000 ay para sa iyo!

What's the brief?

The logo must have the following elements:
1. The theme line: Ready for the World!?
2. The event: The 19th Philippine Advertising Congress
3. The punctuation marks "?" and "!" are mandatory

How do I submit?

1. Submit all entries to the Adboard 19th PAC office, 7th floor Dao I Condominium, 189 Salcedo St., Legaspi Village, Makati City. For inquiries, call 812-0086 or 813-0089.
2. You can also e-mail your entries to 19thadcongress@gmail.com
3. Deadline for submission is on March 30, 2005.

SHELL ROAD CHALLENGE

'I went the distance'

SHELL VP for retail Sammy de Guzman signals start of the challenge.

"I didn't think I'd win. Mukhang professional yung mga ibang drivers e. But I won. Kahit girl ako. Siguro mas magaling lang talaga ang girls magtipid. Haha!"

SUCH are the words of Maria Java, first-place winner of the 1600cc and above vehicle engine category of the Cebu leg of the Shell Better Mileage Road Challenge.

Other challengers were also asked to take a trip down memory lane. First-place winner of the 1500cc and below vehicle engine category of the Manila leg Haydee Nuke recalls her experience.

"It's a good thing it wasn't a race. *Nauna kami sa* finish line. *Kaya lang*, we didn't know that we skipped one stopover so *binalikan pa namin yung* stopover then we traveled back to the finish line. We were lucky mileage *lang yung tinitingnan*. If not, *talo kami*."

But the challengers who didn't win didn't go home empty-handed. Challenger in the 1600cc and above category of the Manila leg Ricardo Gabriel shares his story.

"*Kasama ko yung* daughter *ko, si* Bernadette. *Bonding talaga kami*. In some of the challenges, *nagtutulungan kami*. The other challenges, *nag*-enjoy *si* Bernadette watching her Dad do crazy things. Overall, enjoy *talaga* and we've become closer after that."

Challenger in the 1600cc and above category of the Cebu leg Delbert Bagaman took home a different prize.

"It was a very different experience. The challenges were very exciting. *Marami pa akong natutunang* tips on driving na *tipid sa* gas. And most important of all, I made a lot of new friends."

The Shell Better Mileage
Road Challenge
3
1
2

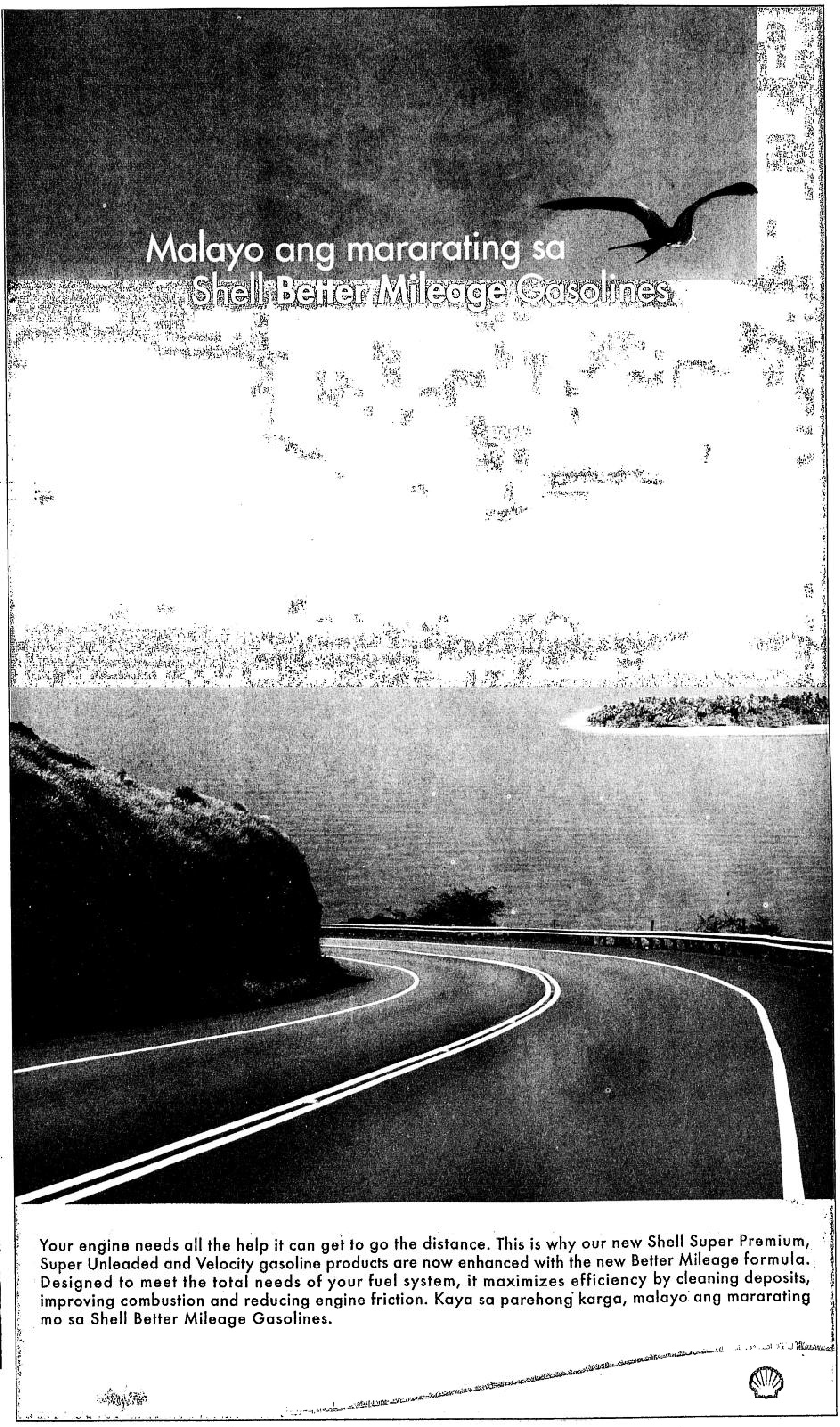
PODIUM FINISH
The top 3 challengers take their respective podium positions. Euven Balcueva and Bernie Marco take 3rd. Miguel Bauza and Cris Cepeda place 2nd. Oscar and Haydee Nuke finish on top. Awarding them are Randy del Valle, Shell Fuels brand manager (left) and Mike Ramolete, regional manager-Metro Manila (right, in shorts).

Aside from all the fun and games, the Shell Better Mileage Road Challenge teaches a very valuable lesson: that anyone of us, you, me, and everyone else reading this, can go further. You don't have to be a pro or an expert driver. You don't have to go to a special driving school. You don't even have to modify your car. No matter who you are, *malayo ang mararating kung gugustuhin*.

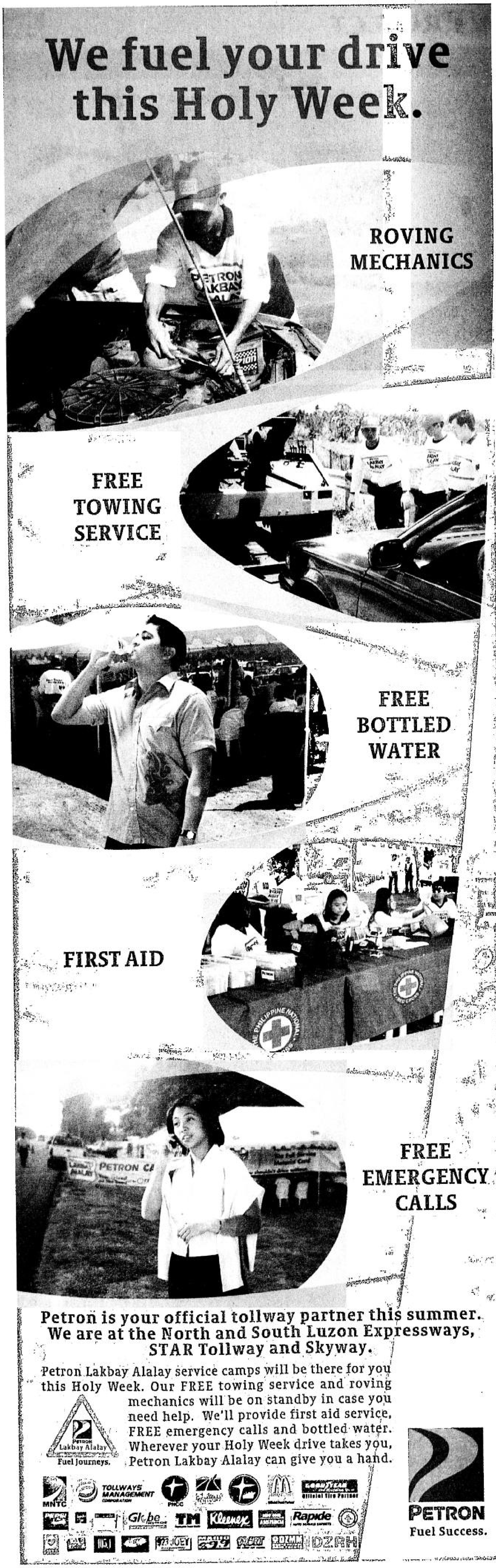
Just drive the right way; safely, defensively. And gas up with Shell Better Mileage Gasolines: Shell Super Premium, Super Unleaded, and Velocity all enhanced with Shell's Better Mileage Formula, designed to clean deposits, improve combustion, and reduce engine friction.

Prove it yourself. Get behind the wheel. Load up with Shell Better Mileage gasolines and see yourself conquer the distance.

RACE DAY
Challengers arrive early at Shell Fort Bonifacio in anticipation of a fun day ahead.



Your engine needs all the help it can get to go the distance. This is why our new Shell Super Premium, Super Unleaded and Velocity gasoline products are now enhanced with the new Better Mileage formula. Designed to meet the total needs of your fuel system, it maximizes efficiency by cleaning deposits, improving combustion and reducing engine friction. Kaya sa parehong karga, malayo ang mararating mo sa Shell Better Mileage Gasolines.


We fuel your drive this Holy Week.

ROVING MECHANICS

FREE TOWING SERVICE

FREE BOTTLED WATER

FIRST AID

FREE EMERGENCY CALLS

Petron is your official tollway partner this summer. We are at the North and South Luzon Expressways, STAR Tollway and Skyway.

Petron Lakbay Alalay service camps will be there for you this Holy Week. Our FREE towing service and roving mechanics will be on standby in case you need help. We'll provide first aid service, FREE emergency calls and bottled water. Wherever your Holy Week drive takes you, Petron Lakbay Alalay can give you a hand.

Petron Lakbay Alalay Fuel Journeys.

PETRON Fuel Success.

Travel with ease

Petron Lakbay Alalay Fuel Journeys.

By Marlet D. Salazar

THE LENTEN season does not only mean doing some reflection and getting in touch with your spirituality. For many, it is also a chance to get together with family and friends on a road trip away from the city.

And for the past 19 years, Petron's pioneering initiative of road assistance has made the life of travelers worry-free. Lakbay Alalay once again hits the road this Holy Week to extend its service and commitment to motorists throughout the season.

Lakbay Alalay covers three service points and three camps from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday (except Good Friday) or from March 23 to 27. Camps are situated at the North Luzon Expressway, South Luzon Expressway, Skyway, and at the Star Tollway in Batangas. Petron's stations and campsites are also equipped and ready to assist motorists beleaguered with vehicle problems.

Gilberto Manlangit, Petron's sales development manager for reseller trade said this year the camp at the NLEX would be in partnership with Manila North Tollway Corp (MNTC).

"The emergency roadside assistance of MNTC this year is with conjunction with private firms," Manlangit said. "What we intend to do is to complement their activities with our Lakbay Alalay services."

"We feel that our partnership with them is bringing out Lakbay Alalay to a new level considering the standards of MNTC," he added.

These campsites will be manned by 150 or so volunteers composed of Petron employees who will be joined by groups from the Philippine National Red Cross, and mechanics from Rapidé. There will be 10 mechanics stationed in each camp so there'd be no worry of long lines or any major delay in your trip.

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Instead of spending the Holy Week in their favorite summer spot, these volunteers, especially the many men and women of Petron—from the managers to the clerks—commit themselves to assist the motorists as gratitude to the loyal patrons of the stations everyday.

A week before Holy Week, Petron stations gave free 5-point check-ups for vehicles. For motorists who own Class 1 vehicles, Lakbay Alalay will be providing free towing services in the event that their cars break down in the middle of the road.

"Lakbay Alalay's assistance is not limited to vehicles checkups," said Mark Anthony Lopez of Petron's sales development for reseller trade. "We will also provide free emergency calls, first aid and medical assistance, drinking water, and if you want to freshen up, Biolink will be providing an area for you to do so."

Along the tollways, motorists will encounter several Safe Trip Tips that is part of the whole assistance efforts of Petron to the public this season. Petron encourages observing road safety especially when traveling with children. It had a leafleting campaign for road safety for kids aside from the road safety reminders along the highways.

To be able to monitor the traffic situation along the expressway and keep track of Lakbay Alalay details, travelers can text <lakbay> to 2363 for Globe and Touch Mobile subscribers, and 2600 for Smart, Talk and Text, and Addict Mobile subscribers.

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Petron has made it an annual effort to assist motorists in having a worry-free trips during Holy Week, and Manlangit assures that "Lakbay Alalay operatives will be there to help you. They will see you through your journey."

"Whether it's roadside assistance or you just want to freshen up, we will be there for you," Lopez said.

Lakbay Alalay traveling and safety tips

ILLUSTRATION BY: ALIZZA C. BUTIONG

PETRON'S Lakbay Alalay initiative has made an impact to motorists as they have become more aware of the safety guidelines in traveling. Better check your vehicle and make sure that you have enough of the necessities in traveling before hitting the road.

Below are some guidelines from Petron to help you check your vehicle if it's fit for long travel:

Belts - Check the car's fan belt and the aircon belt for wear and tear. If you find cracks on it have it replaced immediately. When you hear a high-pitched noise coming from your hood when you start the aircon, your aircon belt is loosely fitted. Have it tightened or else it will suddenly fly out of its railing. It is a good practice to have reserved belts always on your vehicle.

Brakes - Always check the brake fluid on your reservoir. Inspect your car for fluid leaks. Check your brake pedal by pumping it, if the pedal slides inward even when you're applying steady pressure, your brakes have leaks.

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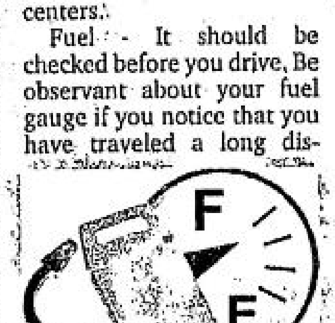

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Fuel Journeys.

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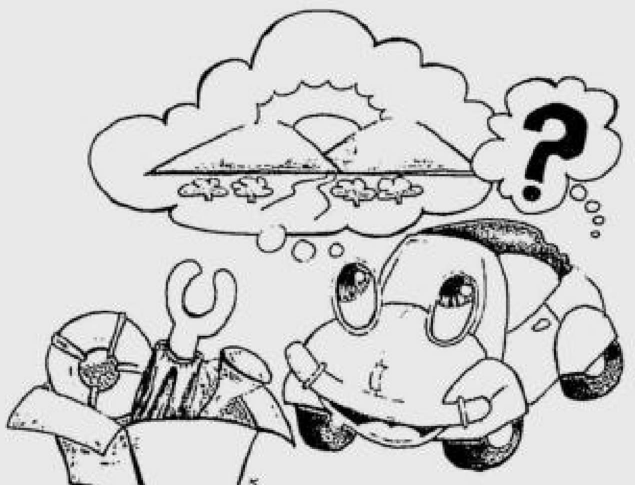

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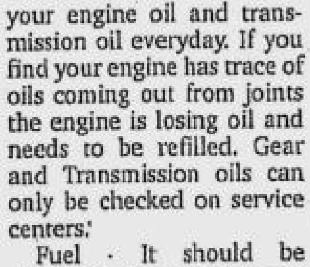

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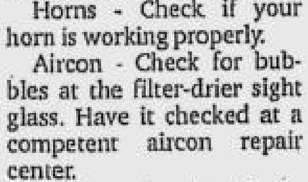

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Fuel Journeys.

MNTC TOLLWAYS MANAGEMENT CORPORATION PNCC Official Tire Partner Globe TM Kleenex Rapide DZRH

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Since 1960
Union
ELECTRIC FANS
45 years
Basta Ihay! Yun Yan!

Alive and kicking

By Bayani San Diego Jr.
Contributor

PHILIPPINE cinema is alive and kicking, especially in the hands of youthful participants in the forthcoming Cinemalaya film festival.

The festival of independent productions, spearheaded by the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), Philippine Multi-Media Systems Inc., (PMSI) and Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), will run from July 12 to 17 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

Out of 190 entries, 10 finalists made the cut in the full-length feature category (90 to 120 minutes): "Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros" by Michiko S. Yamamoto, "Angela—The Bading Assassin, A Musical" by Francis Hechanova, "Baryoke" by Ron Bryant, "Big Time" by Mario Cornejo, "ICU Bed # 7" by Rica Arevalo "Isnatchers" by Mike Dagnalan and Jun Aves, "Laspong-gols" by Sigfreid Barros-Sanchez, "Pepot Artista" by Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., "Room Boy" by Alfred Aloysius Adlawan, and "Sarong Banggi" by Emmanuel de la Cruz.

There are only six finalists in the short feature category (15 to 20 minutes), chosen out of 196 entries: "Alimuom" by Rommel Tolentino, "Babae" by Sigrid Andrea Bernardo, "Blood Bank" by Pam Miras, "Kultado" by Lawrence Fajardo, "Mansyon" by Joel Ruiz and "Panaginipan" by Anna Isabelle Matutina.

With minimum budget and maximum creativity, the filmmakers were able to make the most of PMSI's P500,000 grant for each project. Since they were shooting with Mini-DV cameras, producer Tony Gloria of Unitel organized a film forum on different technologies available that would convert the digital movies to 35-mm film.

The symposium was held at Greenbelt's My Cinema on Feb. 22 and served as Gloria's blowout—he marked his birthday the day before. "It was my treat to the indie guys whom I first met when I served as judge in the Cinemalaya screening," he said.

With Gloria in the committee were local film stalwarts Nestor Torre, Peque Gallaga, Bien Lumbera and Caloy de Leon.

Good turnout

Gloria spoke highly of the festival participants: "I believe some of them will rock the movie industry!"

"It's a good turnout," agreed filmmaker Laurice Guillen, FDCP chair and CEO.

Aside from Guillen, award-winning filmmaker was also present at the February forum, as well as established young directors Raymond Red and Quark Henares, and debuting indie directors Dante Mendoza and Ellen Ongkeko-Marfil.

Also spotted were actor Pen Medina, dubber Vangie Labalan and singer Leah Navarro. They all expressed interest in digital technology. Guillen acknowledged: "Filmmaking is definitely going digital. That's because the technology has become cheaper and more easily available. For instance, when it first came out, HD (High-Definition) cameras were priced at $300,000. Now they go for $70,000. Anybody can buy one in the mall. And anybody with such a camera and good story can make a movie."

Admittedly, for young aspirants, renting HD cameras could still cost an arm and a leg. But as Gloria pointed out during the forum, there are inventive ways out of this dilemma. "They can first shoot with Mini DVs then upgrade their films and transfer to 35 during post-production, as we did with 'Santa Santita'," Guillen said, referring to her latest movie that is now being shown in the US.

Again, this process may prove expensive. "But as was raised at the forum," Guillen added, "a prospective distributor can shoulder the post-production costs. It's better than just submitting a script to possible investors because you have an actual film to show to them."

And this is the main purpose of Cinemalaya.

"The filmmakers will get the chance to show their films in digital format first," Guillen said. "Without cuts. And if distributors like what they see, they can pick up the post-production bill for a wider theatrical release."

Unitel has expressed interest in some of the entries. Guillen said other forward-looking producers should do the same.

Online marketing

Speaking of the digital revolution, Unitel Pictures International (through Unico Entertainment) has put up www.cine.filipino.com.

The website will offer to online shoppers not only Unitel's prize-winning titles ("Crying Ladies," "Magnifico" and "Imelda"), but also Sampaguita Films classics and the master works of Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal and Mario O'Hara, among others.

Likewise, Gloria announced at the forum: "After long negotiations with Mother Lily Monteverde, we were able to acquire some titles from Regal's impressive catalogue of contemporary film classics. We will restore and subtitle these movies and make them available in the Internet."

DVD distribution is the new ballgame, according to Gloria. "Online retail is one way to beat film pirates in their own game."

The Regal Platinum Series will come in three waves.

The first wave includes "Relasyon" by Ishmael Bernal, "Makiusap sa Diyos" by Lino Brocka, and "Babae sa Bintana by Chito Roño. The second wave consists of "Laro sa Baga" by Roño, "Hahamakin Lahat" by Brocka, and "Makati Avenue: Office Girls" by Jose Javier Reyes. The Third Wave features "Manila by Night (City After Dark)" by Bernal; "Ina, Kapatid, Anak" by Brocka and "The Fatima Buen Story" by Mario O'Hara.

Also in the lineup are Brocka's "Cain at Abel" and Marilou Diaz-Abaya's "Karnal."

The preservation and availability of these "contemporary classics" are imperative, so that today's generation of filmmakers could have a firm grasp of Pinoy cinema history. After all, the past should be celebrated to secure a bright future.

LEAH Navarro and Laurice Guillen

RAYMOND Red and Quark Henares

TONY Gloria: They will rock the boat.

RP movies may yet have a bright future with these young Cinemalaya independent film festival participants

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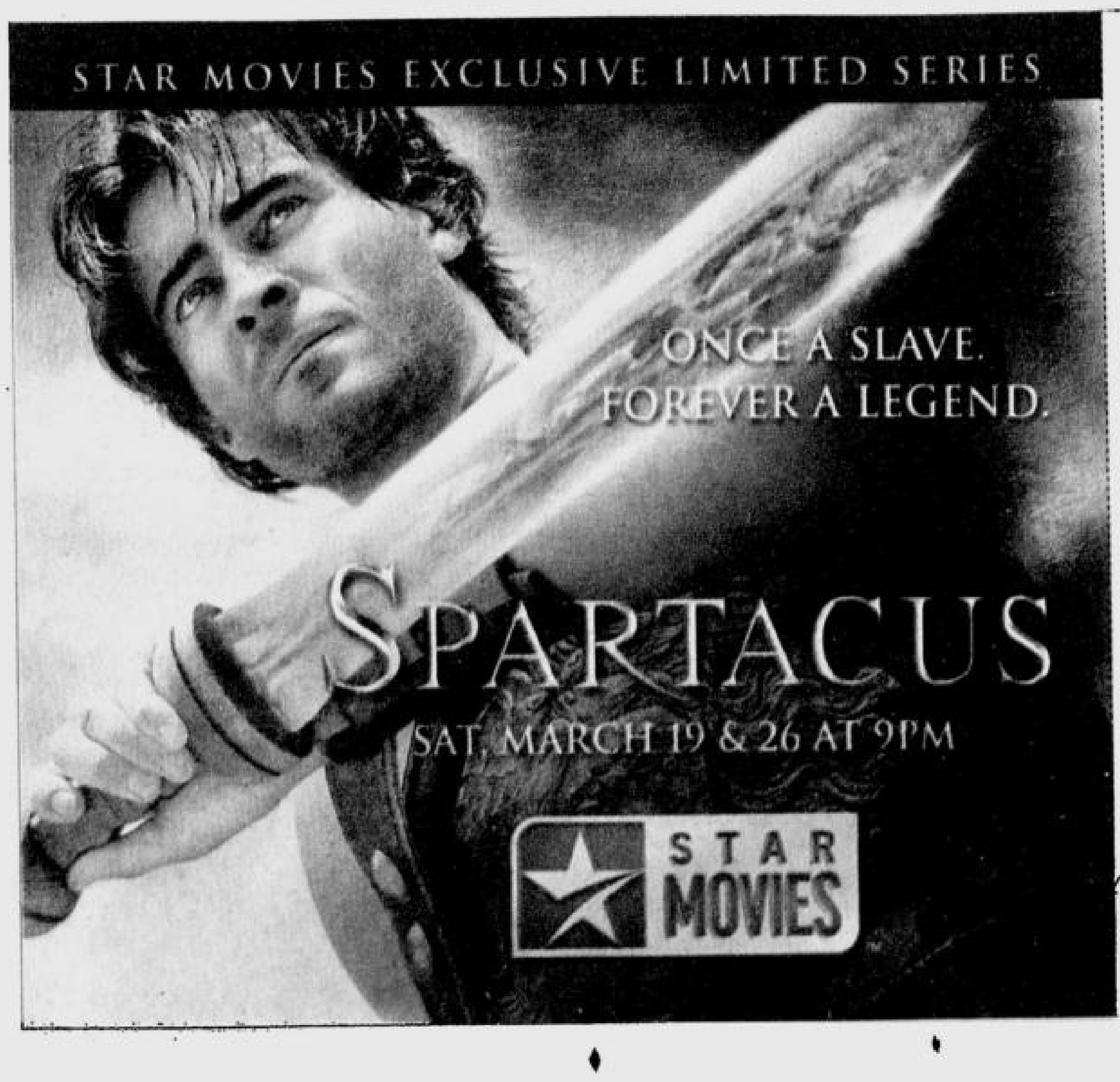
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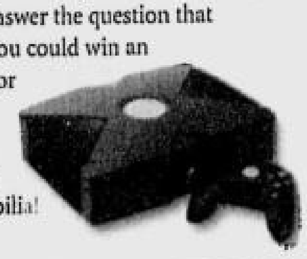

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CURTAIN call with Director Heidi Sison

CEOs, COOs, businessmen and public servants gamely perform to raise funds for community theaters

CHITO Ponce Enrile

LAS PIÑAS Rep. Ed Zialcita

BACOLOD Rep. Monico Puentevella

Look who's singing!

CHEER FACTOR

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

I WAS so prepared to have a bad time when I went to the "CEO Sings Timeless Music" fund-raising concert of the Character Building Foundation Inc. last Wednesday at the Meralco Theater.

Boy, was I disappointed.

Not only was I pleasantly surprised that these CEOs and professionals *could* sing; there was also the bonus of hearing them talk about what Filipinos could achieve if only they put their hearts and minds to it, and if more people concentrated on building character.

Renowned tenor Nolyn Cabahug and Eric Cruz, vice president of construction firm EF Cruz and Co., opened the show just before 8 p.m. with Verdi's "*La Donna e Mobile*."

Cruz set a humorous tone, saying he said he did not know what he was doing there since he was not a CEO. But, he noted, at least he was a COO—"child of owner." That sent the audience guffawing, including his father, Felipe.

That stab at humor erased evil thoughts I had just minutes earlier about how I was wasting my time in a theater that was cold enough to raise penguins, and sparsely populated with people who were mostly old enough to have grandchildren.

Cabahug followed up with an operatic version of folk song "*Pobreng Alindahaw*" and his spine-tingling take on Andrea Bocelli's "The Prayer," which he sang with his sister, Lisa.

Next up was Arthur Mamuntag, owner of Hungree Burgers. He was a dominating presence on stage, as much for his heft as for his effortless singing of the Tony Bennett hit "I Won't Cry Anymore" and Frank Sinatra's "I'll Be Seeing You."

It was not bad at all for the long-haired Mamuntag, whose own mother once told him he couldn't sing. Well, mom should hear him now, and eat her words.

Mamuntag sang so well, that some of the so-called professionals out there ought to be ashamed to wear the tag. A career just might be waiting for Mamuntag, should he decide to stop selling hamburgers.

I was a little sorry to see him leave the stage, but then Corporate Session was another treat.

Corporate Session is composed of two brothers, and their friend who heads the franchise operations of the STI schools. They sounded so much like The Lettermen, it was scary.

They started their set with Paul Anka's "Put Your Head on My Shoulder," followed by The Moonglows' "Sincerely," and The Lettermen's "Shangri-la."

Their voices blended well. And they said the country would certainly be much better off if only people blended just as well, despite differences, and lived in harmony.

Appreciative audience

That aside generated loud cheers and enthusiastic applause from the appreciative audience.

Then the young swans from the Shirley Halili-Cruz Ballet School came on stage, and demonstrated why the ballet company has been named the best in Asia.

Following the young girls was Congressman Monico Puentevella from the lone district of Bacolod City.

I was perhaps one of the handful of thirtysomethings in the audience who did not know that Puentevella was once a professional singer.

He came out in a black suit and sang "This is the Moment" from the Broadway musical 'Jekyll and Hyde" in a way that made me want to give him a standing ovation.

JOSE Mari Chan and lawyer Frank Chavez with fashion models

He sang in a simple but elegant way, so lacking in today's crop of young singers who insist on screaming—not singing—lyrics.

Puentevella said he always wanted to sing that song, and he finally got the chance last Wednesday. He even dyed his hair for the occasion.

He was so nervous, he said, that it felt like he was again in the finals of "Tawag ng Tanghalan."

Character Building Foundation Inc., founded by director Heidi Sison, is raising funds to bankroll its values-formation seminars and other activities, including community theaters.

It believes that what builds character, builds a strong nation.

Puentevella ended his set with "Ikaw," which he dedicated to his late friend, George Canseco, who composed it.

If he is as good a congressman as he is a singer, he would definitely be one of the best in the House.

Opening the second half was Chito Ponce Enrile, introduced as a better singer than the more famous senator. Chito sang "Days of Wine and Roses."

Following him was the diminutive Ed Zialcita, congressman from Las Piñas, who was kind of a spoilsport because, unlike the others who courageously sang their songs live, he lip synched "You're the Best Thing that Ever Happened to Me."

Also unable to sing live was former Solicitor General Frank Chavez, but he made up for it by dancing to the tune of "Blue Suede Shoes," a number that brought the house down.

Next were Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett sound-alikes—architect Sonny Liwanag, who sang "The Way You Look Tonight;" and Rene Henson, president of Palladin Security Agency, who sang "I Got the World on a String" and "Come Fly with Me."

Mr. Melody

Businessman Jose Mari Chan, Mr. Melody himself, sang "A Certain Smile" and "Afterglow," his 1967 hit.

He said it had been a while since he last sang that song, but that he had to that night after Chavez told him that he (Chavez) used to sing it to earn votes for the University of the Philippines student council.

Chan was naturally applauded for his songs, but more for his statement that there truly was hope for the Philippines.

He said he told his children not to leave for jobs abroad, because they owed it to this country to stay.

Lisa Cabahug then capped the show with "I Could Have Danced All Night," after which all the performers went on stage to bask in a standing ovation.

I left Meralco Theater imagining what it must have been like in the 1950s and 1960s when men sang simply, letting the lyrics and the message shine... and danced well.

Having gotten a glimpse of that during the three-hour show, I decided that it had been well worth my time.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
TV GUIDE
Wednesday, March 23, 2005

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Channel	2:30PM	3:00PM	3:30PM	4:00PM	4:30PM	5:00PM	5:30PM	6:00PM	6:30PM	7:00PM	7:30PM	8:00PM	8:30PM	9:00PM	9:30PM	10:00PM	10:30PM	11:00PM	11:30PM
ABS-CBN 2	Kapamilya Cinema				Showbiz No. 1 (4:25 PM)	Gatekeepers (5:10 PM)	Gundam Seed (5:35 PM)	The Road To Stardom	TV Patrol		Spirits	Krystala	Hiram	Save The Last Dance	Til Death Do Us Part	Yes Yes Show			Insider
NBN	Value Vision	Value Vision		Value Vision	Teledyaryo	Value Vision		Talk Ko 'To		Linya		Teledyaryo		Sinulog Festival				Paco Park Presents	
ABC 5			Problema Nyo, Sagot Ko	PBA Game-Bol	PBA		PBA		Sentro	PBA					Big News	American Idol		Look Who's Talking	
GMA 7		Saang Sulok Ng Langit	Joyride	Glass Shoes	One Piece	Knock Out	Tyker Hungry Heart	24 Oras		Extra Challenge		Mulawin		Full House	Stairway To Heaven	Nuts Entertainment			Saksi
RPN 9	Metro TV Shopping			Hey Arnold!	As Told By Ginger	Wild Thornberries	Sponge Bob	Entertainment Tonight	Scrubs	Everwood		Ally McBeal		For Love Or Money 1		Newswatch Now	Pangako Mo	Cerge For Truth	
IBC 13		Lifestyle		EZ Shop		Home Shopping Network	IBC Express Balita	Lifestyle		On Air Tambeyan		Dinsk	Junior Reyes Report	Bestfriends	Celebrity Single	Travel	IBC News Tonite	Breaking Barriers	
Solar		Wwe Heat		WWE Confidential		Fantastic Four	Static Shock	Godzilla	Incredible Hulk	Stargate SG1		Wwe Raw				Wwe Heat		WWE Confidential	
Nickelodeon	Blues Clues	Rugrats	The Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	All That	Are You Afraid of the Dark?	100 Deeds of Eddie McDowd	The Amanda Show	The Adventures Jimmy Neutron	Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	As Told By Ginger	Nick Mix						Rugrats
MYX		Urban MYX		Pop MYX	OPM MYX	Take 5	My MYX	MYX Daily Top Ten		Mellow MYX	Rock MYX	Pop MYX	Urban MYX	MYX Live!		My MYX	MYX Backtrax	OPM MYX	Mellow MYX
ETC	Change of Heart	Blind Date	Fifth Wheel	Starting Over		Simple Life	Knock First	Seinfeld	Ambush Makeover	Complete Savages	What I Like About You	Who Wants To Marry My Dad		Last Comic Standing		Entertainment Tonight	The Insider	Amish In The City	
Cinema One		Walang Karugtong Ang Nakaraan				Nang Isilang Ang Mesiyas				Ipagpatawad Mo			Persona	Separada (9:15 PM)				I'm Sorry My Love	
Studio 23		Urban MYX	Rock MYX	Pop MYX	OPM MYX	Take 5	My MYX	Batman Beyond	Project Arms	Wazzup Wazzup	C.S.I.			Las Vegas		News Central	Oprah		The Good Life With Cory Quirino
AXN		The Amazing Race 5		Maximum Exposure		The Contender		Samurai X		Andromeda (Season III)		Ripley's Believe It or Not		CSI: Crime Scene Investigation		The Contender		Fear Factor	
Star World		The Bold & The Beautiful		American Idol				The Simpsons	The Drew Carey Show	Star News Asia	Friends	American Idol		Philly		Third Watch III		Friends	American Idol
CNN				Business International		Larry King Live		World News	World Sport	Business International		World News Asia		World News	MainSail	World News Asia		World News	World Sport
National Geographic		Showreal Asia		Taboo		Dangerous Jobs		The Snake Wranglers	Croc Chronicles Dr. Brady Barr	Wow		About Asia		Nat'l Geographic Specials		Showreal Asia	Taboo		
Solar Sports		IBF China Super Grand Prix WD		RP-Taiwan 9 Ball Chall. Day3					Davis Cup '05 France vs. Sweden 1st rd.				NBA TV Daily	NBA Game Lakers @ Utah					NBA Inside Stuff
Lifestyle Network	Country Style	Interiors By Design	Decorating With Style	Decorating Cents	Molto Mario	Sweet Dreams	30 Minute Meals	Bill Boggs Corner	Unwrapped	Wolfgang Puck's								New York Nick	
HBO	8 Mile			Evil Never Dies (4:15 PM)			Doctor Detroit (5:45 PM)			Race To Space (7:15 PM)				Tears Of The Sun				Kazaam	
Star Movies	Just A Kiss (2:25 PM)			Go (3:55 PM)			Slums Of Beverly Hills			The Mummy (6:55 PM)				Sonic Impact			Buried Alive 2 (10:40PM)		
Cartoon Network	Scooby-Doo Show	The All New Popeye Show		Tom & Jerry Show	The Woody Woodpecker Show	Sylvester & Tweety Mysteries	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	X-Men Evolution	Static Shock	Gundam Wing	Shaman King	The Looney Tunes Show		The Powerpuff Girls	Dexter's Laboratory	Mr. T	Josie And The Pussycats	The Superfriends	Samurai Jack
ESPN		Motorsport Asia	2005 Big East C'ship West Virginia vs Villanova				LPGA Golf Safeway Int'l Presented by Coca-Cola				Goals!	Sportscenter Asia	2004 Int'l Chall of Champs Unc, CT USA		Pro Billiards '04 Trick Shot Magic NV, USA		2004 Women's Tournament of Champions		Sportscenter Asia
Disney Channel	Mr Bean: The Animated Series	Totally Spies	The Sleepover Club	Art Attack/Untalkative Bunny	That's So Raven	Martin Mystery	Totally Spies	Kim Possible	Mr Bean: The Animated Series	Lilo & Stitch/Untalkative Bunny	The Jungle Book 2			My Wife And Kids	That's So Raven	America's Funniest Home Video	According To Jim	Sabrina: The Teenage Witch: Friends Forever	
Cinemax				20 Million Miles To Earth			Fire Down Below				Countdown			Stealing Candy			Blade II		
Hallmark Channel	Mad About You	Lives Of The Saints				Play With Me Sesame	Sesame Street		Bewitched	Judging Amy		Missing		Defending Our Kids: The Julie Posey Story			Strong Medicine (10:35PM)		Judging Amy (11:25PM)
Discovery Channel		Science Mysteries		Science Frontiers		Wild Science		Ultimate Discovery		Colosseum: Rome's Arena Of Death		Beehives And Runaway Brides		Wild Science		Ultimate Discovery		Hour Asia	
MTV Philippines													Whatever Things						
Sports Plus				NCAA rd.2				Inside the PGA	You've Got to See This	NBA Game: Detroit @ Cleveland					Bikini Destination	World Poker Tour ep 10 Hollywood	You've Got to See This		
EWTN	Council Of Faith	Angelus (3:15 PM)	Refurbishing The Soul	The Donut Man	Faith Factory	The Holy Rosary With Mother Angelica and the Nuns Of Our Lady Of Angels Monastery	Saints For The Third Millenium	The Virtues	EWTN Gallery	Mother Angelica Live Classics		One In Their Hearts	Pope Pius XII	Daily Mass		Angelus (10:15PM)	St. Catherine Of Sienna	Our Father's Plan	

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TUWING HUWEBES pagkatapos ng American Idol
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INQ TV

Dance music brings back memories

By Ruben M. Cruz Jr.
Contributor

DEPENDING on which decade witnessed one's coming of age, the spectacle at Remembrances Bar along Mabini Street in Manila some nights ago was either a dream high school dance revival or a live John Hughes' Brat Pack movie.

It was just a few minutes before midnight and the people were blurting out one request after another from the '80s.

When the band, Rani Jacinto Project, opted for Tears for Fears' "Everybody Wants to Rule the World," several thirtysomething ladies hit the dance floor, pulling much younger guys along with them. Those decidedly bar-bound-launched into the hand dance made famous by the Tears duo Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith.

That was something I never thought I would experience again. The feelings that welled up inside me were as strangely familiar as the guitar riffs that moved the crowd. A dent had been made in the space-time continuum.

I would find out later that the RJP band invariably elicited such nostalgia wherever they performed.

While most people their age have usually settled down in chosen careers, RJP's five members, all in their 30s and with secure day jobs, lead a second life, at least at night.

The only reason

"We came together for one reason—to have a great time playing the songs that we love," architect-by-day Andy Estalila told INQUIRER Entertainment. Estalila is a musical polymath who sings and plays the guitar. He also plays keyboards when RJP deviates from its acoustic set-up in Unplugged, the Malate music lounge that has been the band's home since they started playing publicly two years ago.

THE RANI Jacinto Project

What about rocking a house silly and making grownups dance like teens on spiked punch? "Well," Andy said, "it's a bonus.

"We all had similar delusions and dreams when we were young. We had visions of being adored and chased by groupies," joked Noel Saplala, another guitarist and vocalist. He is an insurance broker in his family's own firm. "Somehow reality interceded. We went off to university, pursued different careers. The pay was good, but the soul suffered."

In 1998, old pals Andy and Noel crossed paths once again and played for a band called Area 51. When Area 51 disbanded in 2003, Noel sought out other old friends from La Salle— Joseph Balderian, then a top Ford salesman; and Bimbo Manuel, an IT. manager. Both were eager to wake up from from years of musical Rip Van Winklehood.

Together then, Noel, Andy, Joseph and Bimbo formed the Rani Jacinto Project. For the record, there is no Rani Jacinto either playing in or working with the band.

"It's just a name we came up with while playing with words," explained Joseph. "Noel plays an RJ guitar that looked like Rannie Raymundo's at the time."

As fate would have it, RJP would not only land their first paying gig in Unplugged; they would find their fifth member there as well: public relations practitioner Brian Yamsuan, one of the lounge regulars. The old members were pleased to note that Brian sounded like Darius Rucker, lead singer of Hootie and the Blowfish.

Genre-splicing

Although RJP's danceable acoustic versions of '80s New Wave classics have come to be a hands-down favorite in their performances, the band actually specializes in genre-splicing, the better to please their audiences.

"We try to play the musical touchstones of every generation, even contemporary pop and rock alternatives. Sometimes we even do '40s or '50s standards," Brian said. "But of course we would play them our way."

Tribute to Canseco

SPIN CITY

VIVA Records has assembled in one album some of the best recordings of George Canseco's works by the country's leading artists.

Titled "Paano Kita Mapapasalamatan," the double-disc's lineup includes "Dear Heart" by Sharon Cuneta, "Sana" by Kuh Ledesma, "Ikaw" by Regine Velasquez, "Dito Ba?" by Nora Aunor, "Buksan" by Basil Valdez, "Salamin ng Buhay" by Eugene Villaluz, "Ngayon at Kailanman" by Mark Bautista, "Gaano Kadalas and Minsan" by Vina Morales and "Hiram" by Reema Lucida.

Inspirational songs

FROM Universal Records, another "Best of OPM Series" called "Inspirational Songs." The anthology consists of 12 original recordings ideal for recollection and meditation. These include Gary Valenciano's "Warrior is a Child," Martin Nievera's "Only Selfless Love 2," Gino Padilla's "You'll Never Walk Alone," Martin and Dessa's duet on "The Prayer," Regine Velasquez's "You Were There," Janno Gibbs' "Only Hope" and Jolina Magdangal's "Sana."

Timeless music

"ETERNITY" is a double CD collection featuring 26 timeless numbers, among them: "Amazing Grace" by Hayley Westenra, "Ave Maria" by Placido Domingo, "Mattinata" by Luciano Pavarotti, "All I Ask of You" by Sarah Brightman and Cliff Richard, "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" by Julie Convington, "Memory" also by Brightman, "You're Still You" by Josh Groban and Russell Watson's version of "You Are So Beautiful."

Female voices

"BEST of OPM Female Hits" from Universal Records features Regine Velasquez, Ima Castro, Cacai Velasquez, Joey Albert, Jamie Rivera, Karylle, Arnee, Lea Salonga, Pops Fernandez, Geneva Cruz, Samantha Chavez and Jolina.

The songs include: "Yakapin Mo Ako," "Nandito Ako," "Hindi Ko Kaya," "Maging Sino Ka Man" and "Dito."

Willie Revillame

"PARA sa 'Kin ay Ikaw" is Willie Revillame's twin CD set that consists of his previous hits, the minus-ones of these songs, music videos, plus the title track, which is a brand-new single. There's "Pito Pito," "Beep Beep Beep," "Jok Jok Jok" and "Juntis Ka Na Pala." Also, "Ikaw ang No. 1" and "Walang Pagmamahal."

Bop Pop

"BOP Pop and Other Dance Hits" has quickly gone gold," with "Follow the Leader," "Dragostea Din Tei," "Shake That," "Answer the Phone," "The Power of Bhangra," "Hai Hai Hai," "Saturday Night," "Girl" and "I Wanna Cha Cha."

Posadas live

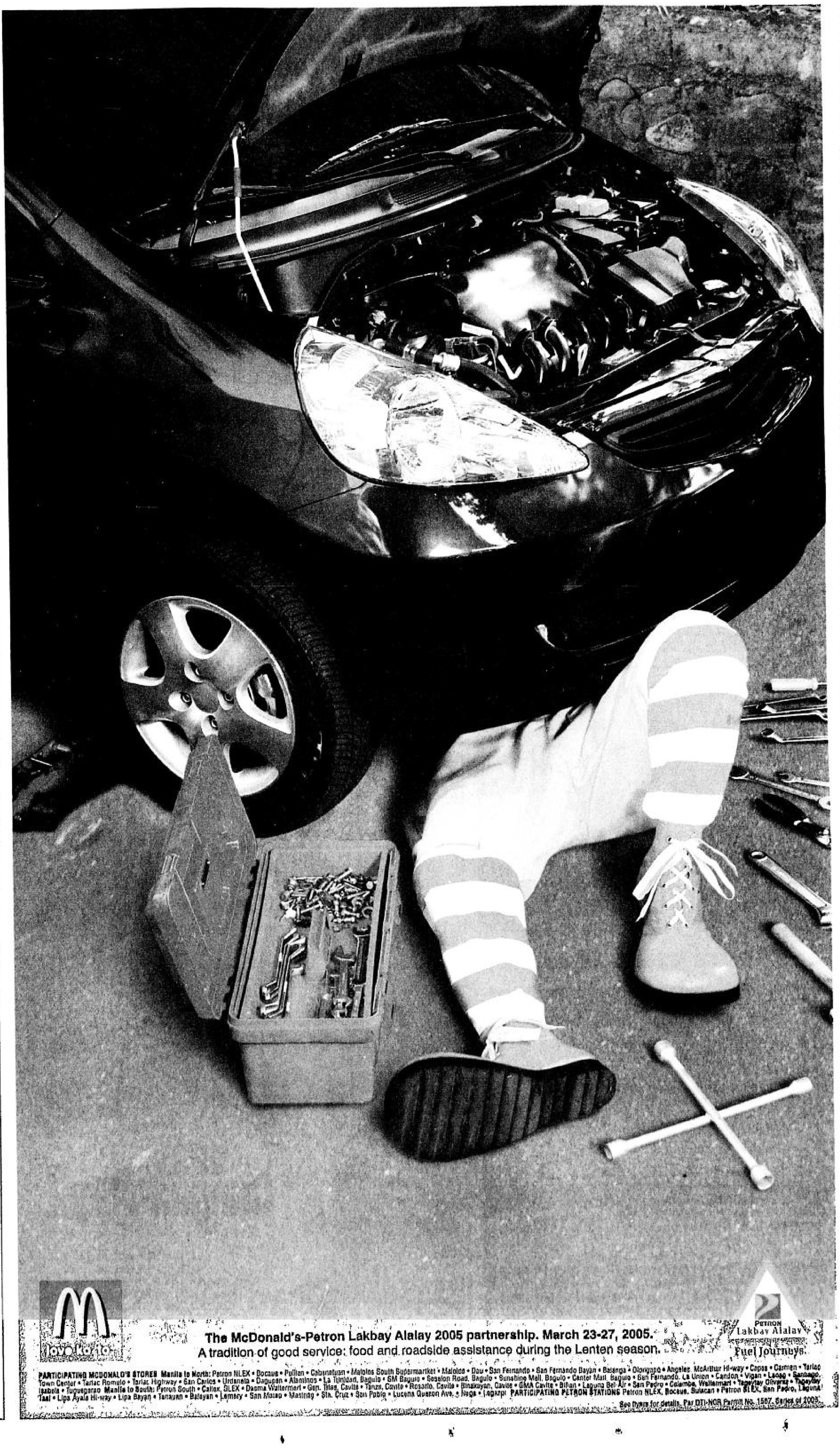
MANNA Records recently launched the CD "Romy Posadas Live In Hollywood," featuring the renowned Pinoy pianist.

Recorded at the Celebrity Center in Hollywood, the CD contains 13 numbers, from Gershwin favorites to jazz classics.

The CD, recorded and mixed by Art and Joey Maramba, is now available at Merk's Bar Bistro. For inquiries, call 757-4720.

My Sheree Amor

"MY Sheree Amor," Sheree's first album is out in the market. The 10 all-original tracks is a collection of pop-jazz, neo-soul, and contemporary R&B numbers. The first single, "Heaven Knows," was released early February. The album, under the EReal Records label, is exclusively distributed by BMG Records Pilipinas.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CINEMA
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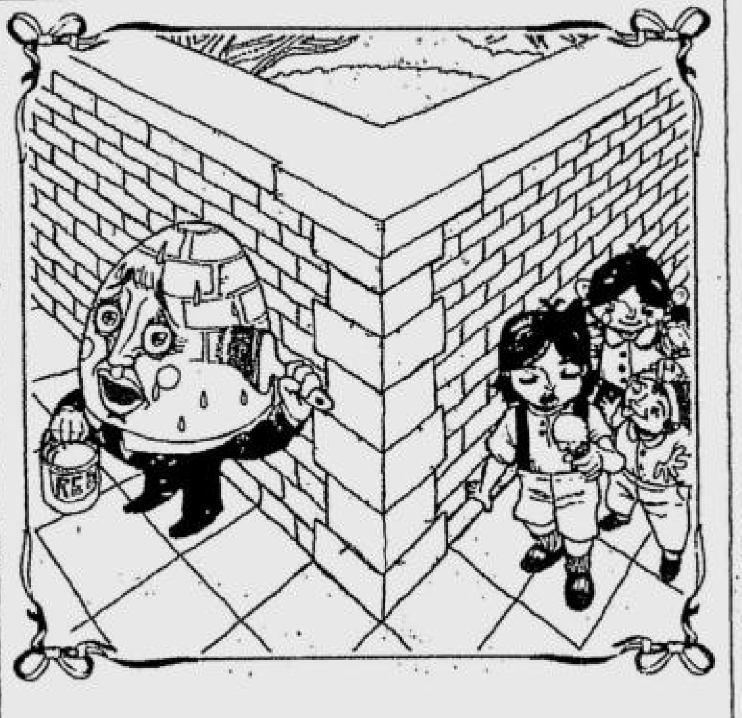
HOSTAGE R13 12:15,2:45,5:15,7:45,10:15	MS. CONGENIALITY 2 PG13 12:20,2:45,5:10,7:35,10:00	THE PACIFIER GP 11:45,1:50,3:55, 6:00,8:05,10:10
HITCH PG13 12:15,2:45,5:15,7:45,10:15	MILLION DOLLAR BABY PG13 1:30,4:20,7:10,10:00	ROBOTS GP 12:00,2:00,4:00, 6:00,8:00,10:00



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1	PACIFIER SNEAK PREVIEW 10:50, 1:15, 3:40 6:05, 8:30, 10:55 GP
2	MS. CONGENIALITY SNEAK PREVIEW 12:10, 2:55, 5:40 8:25, 11:00 GP
3	ROBOTS 10:50, 1:10, 3:35 6:00, 8:25, 10:50 GP
4	HOSTAGE 12:30, 3:10, 5:50 8:30, 11:05 R-13

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① ROBOTS
MTRCB GP
12.10, 2.35, 5:00, 7:25, 9:50 LMF
② MISS CONGENIALITY 2
MTRCB PG-13
11 00, 1 45, 4 30, 7:15, 10 00 LMF
③ CONFIDENCE
MTRCB R-13
12 00, 2.15, 4.30, 6.45, 9 00 LMF
④ PACIFIER
MTRCB GP
12 15, 2 40, 5 05, 7:30, 9 55 LMF
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MTRCB. R-13 11 20, 2.00, 4:40, 7.20, 10.00 LMF
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march 22 and 23
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Sandra Bullock

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AP

BULLOCK, waitress

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LOVE, stripper

PITT, mascot

What they did before they be

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

WHAT do actors do before they become stars? They take lessons, wait—and work to keep a roof over their heads before stardom assures them a life of awesome fame and profligate fortune.

Sandra Bullock shares: "I started in movies by doing small student films in New York and waitressing—two very important talents to have as an actor!"

Courtney Love was a groupie and a stripper at age 14, enabling her to develop the skills she would later need as a rock star's wife and, later, as Hollywood's resident Martian.

Jon Bon Jovi crewed for Burger King, **Sharon Stone** worked the counter at McDonald's, **Anna Nicole Smith** earned her wings at Jim's Krispy Fried Chicken, and **Brad Pitt** worked in a rubber suit as an El Pollo Loco mascot! What would future show biz stars do without fast food chains!

And what do **Burt Reynolds, Jean-Claude Van Damme, John Goodman** and **Alec Baldwin** have in common? They once moonlighted as big, beefy nightclub bouncers!

What about **Bruce Willis, Tom Arnold** and future bigwig producer **Mike Ovitz**? They were bartenders.

As for **Barbra Streisand, Lauren Bacall** and **Sylvester Stallone**—they were theater ushers. (Stallone had a more "interesting" sideline, as a soft-porn movie stud, but that's another story.)

And "NYPD Blue's" **Dennis Franz** confesses:

"I was the worst postman in the history of the post office. I used to start my route at daybreak and I would finish long after dark. I'd stop for doughnuts, I'd play with animals. Then I'd go home with my bag of mail and just lay around the house."

At the start of this piece, we wrote that future stars wait.—Well, that's really what many of them did—and they got paid for it, too. In Hollywood, the words "waiter" and "actor" are practically interchangeable!

A representative sample of those who slaved in the food service industry includes **Antonio Banderas, David Caruso, Geena Davis, Ellen Degeneres, Robert Downey Jr., Andy Garcia, James Garner, Gene Hackman, Woody Harrelson, Dustin Hoffman, Jessica Lange, Julia Ormond, Roseann Barr, Meryl Streep, Kathleen Turner** and **Raquel Welch**!

Feedback

FROM Glenda Tapire of Lipa City: "This Holy Week, it

but must be ready to sh

'Powerpuffypalooza

WEEKDAYS on April 11
Network, "Powerpuffyp
ered hour with new epi
the new series, "Hi Hi P
lar girl band.

Global challenges

EVERY Sunday at 7:30 a
"Global Challenges," wh
able development. It foc
scale community proj
could change the world.

The show aims to re
ence and technology hel

'Happy Tales'

"HAPPY Tales," the 14-
Gakkai International P
been acknowledged to
also brimming with valu
were received with gr
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The series will next h
nel 7 on tomorrow, Frid
to 2:30 p.m. in respon
broadcast slot when
award-winning product

"Happy Tales" is bei
Asian Foundation for C
Arts and Culture, and
rupted Holy Week run,
ween episodes.

Pundaquit Festival

THE 12TH Pundaquit
cludes these Holy Week
March 25, a solemn c
den's Seven Last Words
Sunday concert featuri
tenor **Ronan Ferrer**, so
baritone **Chris Ong** in a
tata and favorite arias.
bolipata@yahoo.com.

'Nasaan Si Hesus?'

LOURDES "Bing" Pim
sical revue, "Nasaan s
again today at the Phila
the United Social Secu
the Manila Lions Club.

The religious music
country's bishops, he
Gaudencio Rosales a
ence of the Philippine
nando Capalla.

The sponsors hope th
of "Nasaan Si Hesus?"
their relationship with G

TFC is now in Ho

HORDES of fans stood hours in line to watch the Hong Kong premiere of Star Cinema's "Anak" in May 2000. Pandemonium ensued when the movie's stars, Vilma Santos and Claudine Barretto, turned up.

Looking back now, it was only a preview of ABS-CBN's broadcast service launch in the former Crown Colony. Recently, the network's The Filipino Channel (TFC) was launched there to address resident Filipinos' clamor for local

entertainm

In partn
TV Netwo
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Filipinos o

ABS-CB
Channel 2
the Philipp

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GARCIA, waiter

came stars

should do us good to watch "The Passion of the Christ" again. A second viewing recently gave me some new insights, and intensified my gratitude for Jesus Christ's supreme sacrifice for mankind. I also realized that we cannot be mere spectator, re in Jesus' suffering.

'

at noon and 8 p.m. on Cartoon alooza" presents a girl-powsodes of "Powerpuff Girls" and iffy Ami Yumi," about a popu-

.m. and 10 p.m., CNN presents ich features reports on sustainises on everything from smallcts to innovative ideas that

veal how various fields of scip to improve the quality of life.

episode animé series by Soka resident **Daisaku Ikada**, has be not only child-sensitive, but es. Its first two runs on GMA 7 at favor by parent and child ntry.

ave a very special run on Chanay and Saturday, from 12 noon e to numerous requests for a nore children can watch the ons.

g presented by the Southeast ildren and Television, Shinano GMA Network in this uninterwith commercial gaps only bet-

estival at Casa San Miguel inpresentations: On Good Friday, dlelight performance of Hay- On March 27, a joyous Easter g the Pundaquit Virtuosi with rano **Maria Saporsantos**, and rendition of Bach's Coffee Can- Call 903-8657 or e-mail coke-

ntel's acclaimed religious mu- Hesus?," will be performed nlife Theater on UN Avenue by ity System Members Inc. and

al has been endorsed by the ided by Manila Archbishop nd Catholic Bishops Confers President Archbishop Fer-

it the Holy Week performance will help Christians strengthen od.

APRIL DATE SET

Mossimo Bikini Summit is set at the Araneta Coliseum on April 30. This fourth edition is the biggest in terms of the number of participants, 32 male and female candidates this year. For details, call 910-0158. And for tickets, call 911-5555 (SM Ticketnet) of the Araneta Coliseum box office.

ong Kong

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ership with Hong Kong Cable k's Cable TV, the biggest pay r in the territory, TFC now nother network's most poputically acclaimed programs ws, plus informative and enshows made especially for erseas.
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synopsis:
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APRIL 13-19

MTRCB Rating: R-18
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Allen Dizon
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2 (DOLBY) MISS CONGENIALITY PG13
3 (DOLBY) CONFIDENCE R13
4 (DOLBY) PACIFIER GP

PREMIERE

(DOLBY) HOSTAGE R13

CINEMA 2000
Cinema 2000 Waltermart Makati
Waltermart Center, Chino Roces Ave. cor. Antonio Arnaiz Pio del Pilar, Makati City
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1 ROBOTS
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD
4 HOSTAGE

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2 RESERVED
3 RESERVED
4 RESERVED
5 RESERVED

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2 HOSTAGE
3 SHAOLIN VS' EVILDEAD

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1 RESERVED
2 RESERVED
3 BAHAY NI LOLA
4 (DOLBY DIGITAL EX) SHAOLIN VS' EVILDEAD
5 RENOVATION

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1 PACIFIER
2 ROBOTS
3 HOSTAGE
4 BAHAY NI LOLA
5 (DOLBY) SHAOLIN VS' EVILDEAD
6 MS. CONGENIALITY 2

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2 RESERVED

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1 (DDS) SHAOLIN VS' EVILDEAD
2 (SDDS) HITCH
3 (DTS) ROBOTS
4 (GOLD SDDS) MISS CONGENIALITY (SNEAK PREVIEW)
5 (GOLD DOLBY) HOSTAGE
6 (GOLD SDDS) PACIFIER (SNEAK PREVIEW)
7 (GOLD DOLBY) MISS CONGENIALITY (SNEAK PREVIEW)
8 (DOLBY) BAHAY NI LOLA
9 (DOLBY) CURSE
10 (DOLBY) FINAL CUT

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CURSED
THE PACIFIER
MILLION DOLLAR BABY
ROBOTS
BAHAY NI LOLA 2
LEMONY SNICKET'S

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1 THE PACIFIER
2 MISS CONGENIALITY
3 HOSTAGE
4 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
5 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD

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1 BAHAY NI LOLA
2 BUKO PANDAN
3 ASSAULT ON PRECINT 13
4

Universal
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1 BAHAY NI LOLA

Jade Cinema
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1 (DOLBY EX) MASK-2 SON OF THE MASK
2 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
3 (DTS EX) ROBOTS
4 IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE

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1 BAHAY NI LOLA
2 WEREWOLF
3 (DOLBY) MASK-2 SON OF THE MASK
4 (DTS) ROBOTS

Cine Nepo
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2 INFECTION
3 (DOLBY) THE AVIATOR
4 (DTS) CONSTANTINE

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2 LEMONY SNICKETS

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3 (DOLBY) ROBOTS
4 (DOLBY) HOSTAGE

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(Calamba) tel (049) 545.7383

1 FINAL CUT
2 (DTS) BAHAY NI LOLA
3 (DOLBY) ROBOTS
4 PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Cinema 2000 Pavilion Mall
(Biñan) tel (049) 411.1146

1 BAHAY NI LOLA
2 (DOLBY) FINAL CUT
3 (DTS) ROBOTS
4 MASK-2 SON OF THE MASK

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2 INFECTION
3 (DOLBY) CONSTANTINE

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2 INFECTION
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4 (DTS) CONSTANTINE

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1 BUNSHINSABA
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 (DOLBY) MASK-2 SON OF THE MASK

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2 WALANG MALISYA
3 KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
4 (DTS) CONSTANTINE

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2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 (DTS) ROBOTS
4 BUKID AY BASA
5 FINAL CUT

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2 INFECTION
3 (DTS) BIRHEN NG MANAOAG
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1 HITCH
2 LEMONY SNICKETS
3 PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
4 FINAL CUT

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1 BUKID AY BASA
2 SHAOLIN VS' EVILDEAD

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1 HITCH • THX
12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
2 ROBOTS
10:45 1:00 3:15 5:30 7:45 10:00
3 CONFIDENCE
10:50 1:05 3:20 5:35 7:40 10:00
4 CURSED
12:40 3:00 5:20 7:40 10:00
5 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
10:45 1:00 3:15 5:30 7:45 10:00
6 PASSION OF THE CHRIST
11:40 2:15 4:50 7:25 10:00
7 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD
12:40 3:00 5:20 7:40 10:00
8 HOSTAGE
12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
9 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
11:00 1:50 4:40 7:30 10:00
10 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
Sneak Preview

ERMITA 536-7809 to 12

1 ROBOTS
11:00 1:10 3:20 5:30 7:40 9:50
2 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
11:10 1:20 3:25 5:30 7:35 9:40
3 HOSTAGE
10:20 12:40 3:00 5:20 7:40 10:00
4 CURSED
10:30 12:45 3:00 5:15 7:30 9:45
5 CONFIDENCE
10:30 12:25 2:20 4:15 6:10 8:05 10:00
6 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD
11:00 1:10 3:20 5:30 7:40 9:50
7 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
Sneak Preview

METRO EAST 682-8193 • 682-8199

1 PASSION OF THE CHRIST
11:30 1:55 4:20 6:40 9:00
2 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
Sneak Preview
3 CURSED
11:10 1:40 4:10 6:40 9:10
4 HITCH
11:00 1:30 4:00 6:30 9:00
5 ROBOTS
10:50 1:10 3:30 5:50 8:10 10:30
6 HOSTAGE
11:50 2:30 5:10 7:50 10:30
7 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD
10:25 12:50 3:15 5:40 8:05 10:30
8 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
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NOVALICHES 935-3229/31

1 ROBOTS
11:00 1:20 3:40 6:00 8:25
2 HOSTAGE
12:50 3:20 5:50 8:25
3 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
11:00 1:00 3:00 5:00 7:00 9:00
4 CURSED
1:20 3:40 6:00 8:25
5 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD
11:00 1:20 3:40 6:00 8:25
6 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
Sneak Preview
7 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
12:30 3:10 5:50 8:30
8 RESERVE

PIONEER 687-5378

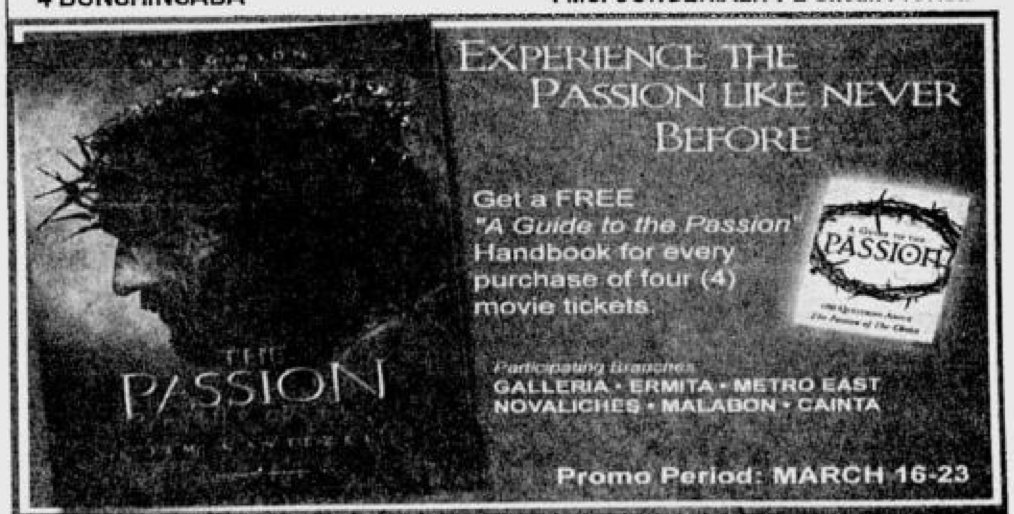
1 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD
2 ROBOTS
3 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
4 MS. CONGENIALITY 2 Sneak Preview

CITISQUARE MALABON 288-2575

1 ASSAULT ON PRECINT 13
2 PASSION OF THE CHRIST
3 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
4 BUNSHINSABA

CAINTA 240-4661

1 ROBOTS
2 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
3 HOSTAGE
4 MS. CONGENIALITY 2 Sneak Preview



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3 CURSED
4 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
5 ROBOTS

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1 PASSION OF THE CHRIST
2 SON OF THE MASK 2
3 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
4 ROBOTS

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1 ROBOTS
2 MS. CONGENIALITY Sneak Preview
3 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
4 HOSTAGE
5 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
6 PASSION OF THE CHRIST

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1 ROBOTS
2 BUKID AY BASA 2
3 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
4 RAY
5 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
6 PASSION OF THE CHRIST

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1 HITCH
2 A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS
3 PASSION OF THE CHRIST
4 PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
5 ROBOTS
6 BIRHEN NG MANAOG

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1 ROBOTS
2 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
3 PASSION OF THE CHRIST
4 SON OF THE MASK 2
5 BIRHEN NG MANAOG
6 BUNSHINSABA

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CHRISTINA RICCI
JOSHUA JACKSON
SHANNON ELIZABETH
JESSE EISENBERG
A WES CRAVEN FILM
CURSED
DIRECTED BY WES CRAVEN WRITTEN BY KEVIN WILLIAMSON

TV specials this week

STARSTRUCK stars (from left) Rainier Castillo, Mark Herras, CJ Muere and Mike Tan

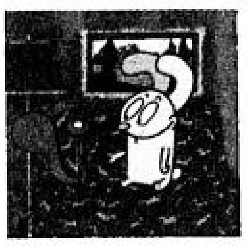
JOHNNY Litton interviews Fr. Joey Faller of The Healing Church in Lucban tonight, 11 p.m., on ABC 5's "Look Who's Talking."

'Bulaga' drama

"Eat Bulaga!" presents the last of its Holy Week drama specials today, starting at 12 noon on GMA 7. "Tahanan," a story about love for family, features Joey de Leon, Allan K and Michael V.

'Huling Salita'

Jesuit Communications collaborates with ABS-CBN to present two special broadcasts. "Huling Habilin," a musical variety show hosted by Bo Sanchez, offers a fresh perspective on the Seven Last Words with performances by Noel Cabangon, Cooky Chua and Bukas Palad Music Ministry. It will be aired on Good Friday at 4 p.m. "Huling Salita," a documentary presentation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, will be shown on Black Saturday at 4 p.m.



Easter treats

On March 26 at 12 noon, Disney airs "Finding Nemo." Catch the adventures of the "Untalkative Bunny" at 1:30 p.m., 3 p.m., 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. In between, Lilo and Stitch takes the limelight at 2 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. "Treasure Planet" takes viewers on a journey across a fantasy universe at 7:30 p.m..

SOP Easter

This Sunday, watch SOP Concert TV with hosts Janno Gibbs, Jaya, Ogie Alcasid and Regine Velasquez as they celebrate Easter at 12 noon on Channel 7. StarStruck talents Rainier Castillo, Mark Herras, CJ Muere, Mike Tan and Ryza Cenon are also mainstays in the noontime show.

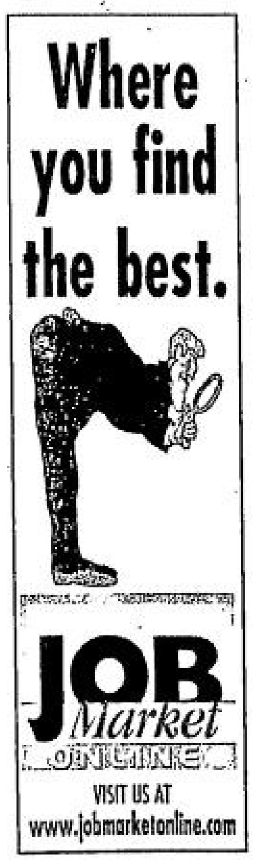
RYZA Cenon

'Dramarama'

Weekdays at 3:30 p.m., GMA 7 presents "Now and Forever," its latest afternoon drama anthology.

A DID YOU KNOW...

THE OLONGAPO city government reportedly allotted P50,000 for the campaign of Bb. Pilipinas candidate **Aulorence Alipon** to land a spot in the winners' circle via text messages. Had her supporters used the entire amount to buy the necessary cell phone load, she may have placed higher.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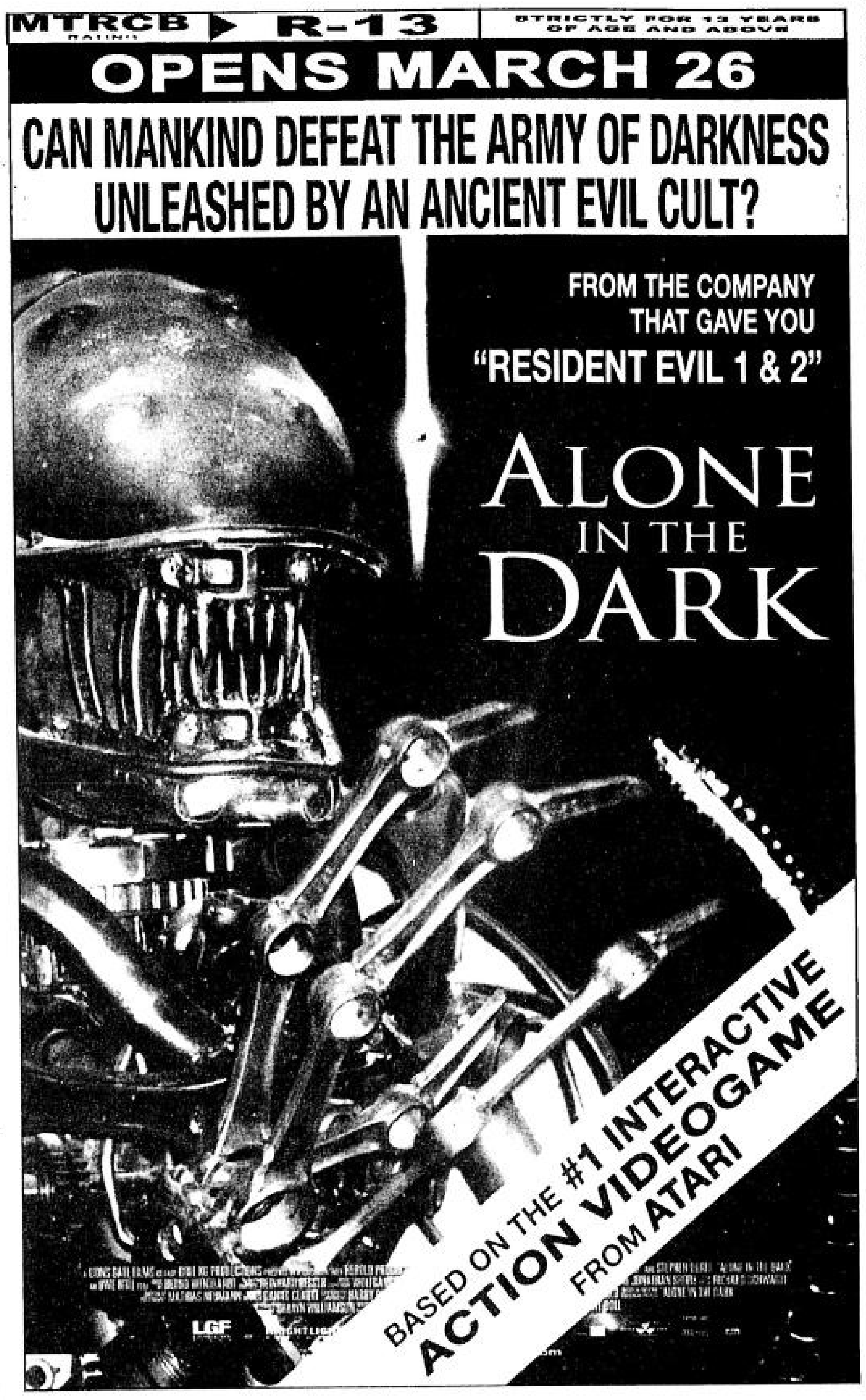
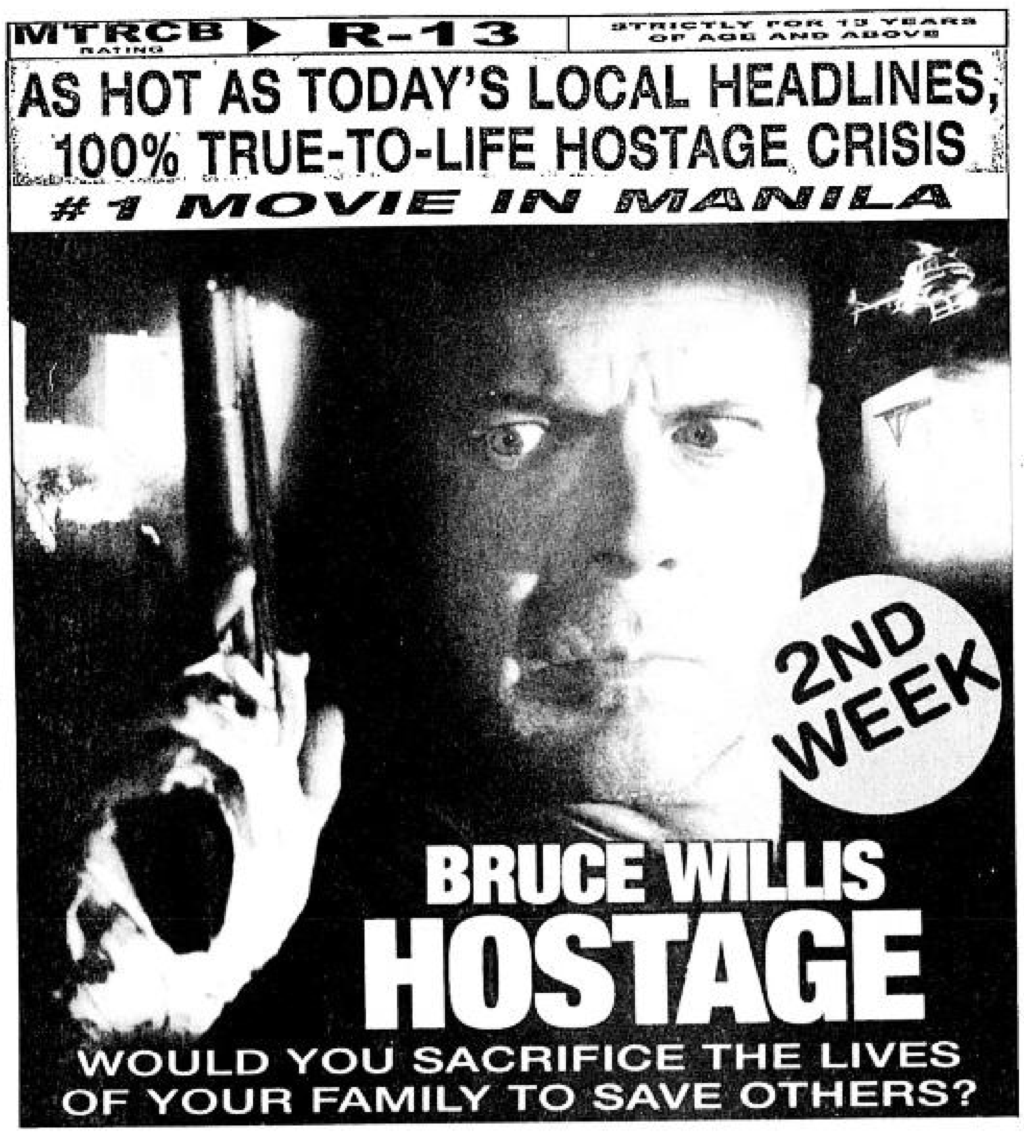
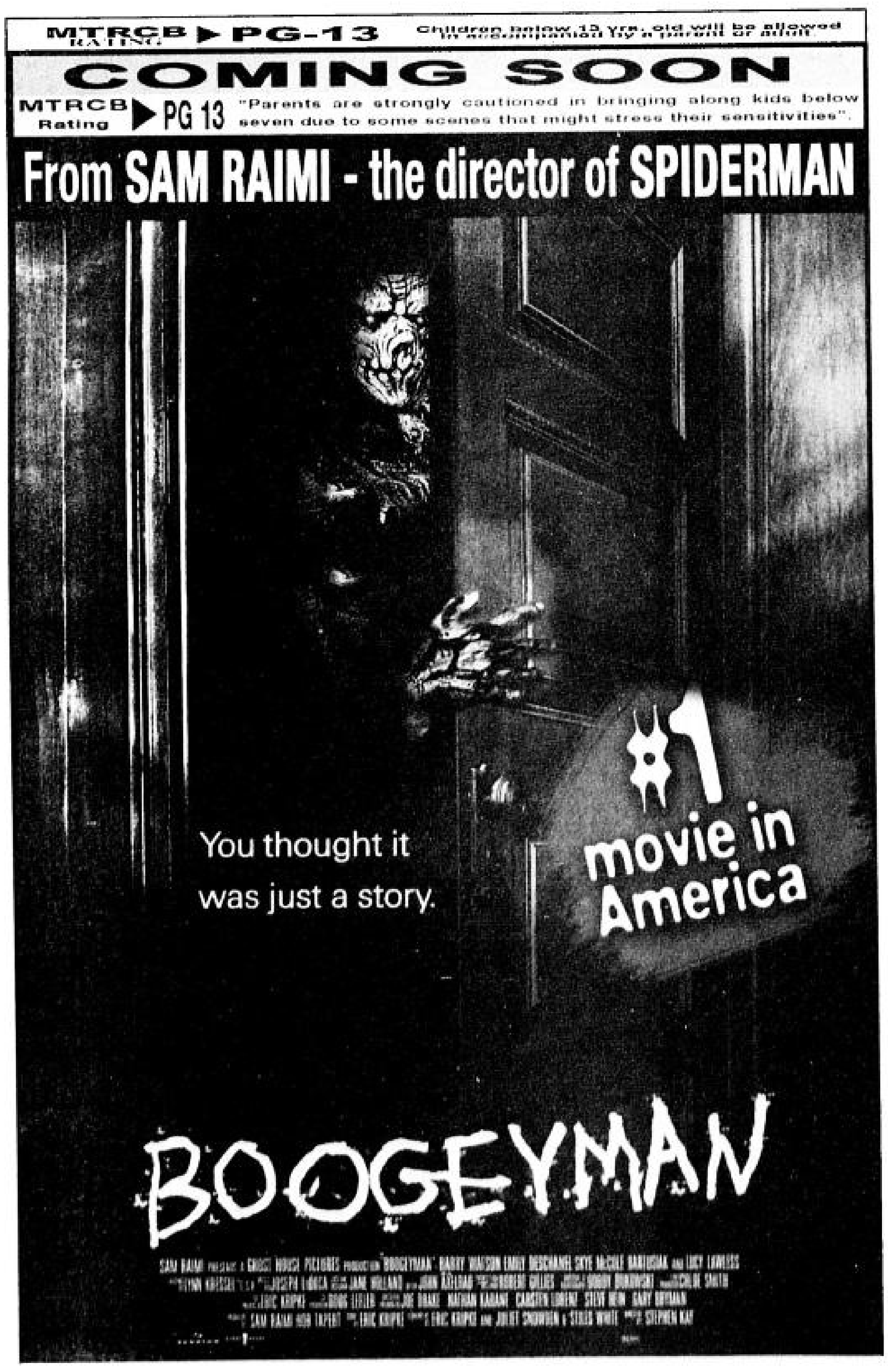

MTRCB RATING ▶ R-13
STRICTLY FOR 13 YEARS OF AGE AND ABOVE
OPENS MARCH 26
CAN MANKIND DEFEAT THE ARMY OF DARKNESS UNLEASHED BY AN ANCIENT EVIL CULT?
FROM THE COMPANY THAT GAVE YOU "RESIDENT EVIL 1 & 2"
ALONE IN THE DARK
BASED ON THE #1 INTERACTIVE ACTION VIDEOGAME FROM ATARI


MTRCB RATING ▶ R-13
STRICTLY FOR 13 YEARS OF AGE AND ABOVE
AS HOT AS TODAY'S LOCAL HEADLINES, 100% TRUE-TO-LIFE HOSTAGE CRISIS
#1 MOVIE IN MANILA
2ND WEEK
BRUCE WILLIS
HOSTAGE
WOULD YOU SACRIFICE THE LIVES OF YOUR FAMILY TO SAVE OTHERS?


MTRCB RATING ▶ PG-13
Children below 13 yrs. old will be allowed if accompanied by a parent or adult
COMING SOON
MTRCB Rating ▶ PG 13
"Parents are strongly cautioned in bringing along kids below seven due to some scenes that might stress their sensitivities".
From SAM RAIMI - the director of SPIDERMAN
You thought it was just a story.
#1 movie in America
BOOGEYMAN

Araneta Center
Entertainment Guide

CINEMA SCHEDULES

Gateway CINEPLEX 10
LEVEL 4, GATEWAY MALL
Online Vista Ticket Computer System
DOLBY DIGITAL-EX
ONLY P99 ADMISSION • P120 RESERVED SEATS

FOR INQUIRIES, PLEASE CALL TICKETNET AT 911-5555

HOSTAGE 12:00 / 2:30 / 5:00 / 7:30 / 10:00	THE PACIFIER 1:10 / 3:10 / 5:10 / 7:10 / 9:10
HITCH 1:15 / 3:50 / 6:25 / 9:00	MILLION DOLLAR BABY 6:10 / 9:00
MISS CONGENIALITY 2 1:45 / 4:15 / 6:45 / 9:15	ROBOT 1:10 / 3:10 / 5:10 / 7:10 / 9:10
CONSTANTINE / PASSION OF THE CHRIST 12:15 / 5:05 / 9:55 - 2:35 / 7.25	BAHAY NI LOLA 2 1:10 / 3:10 / 5:10 / 7:10 / 9:10
CURSED 12:00 / 2:00 / 4:00	SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS 12:20 / 2:35 / 4:50 / 7:05 / 9:20

ALI MALL CINEMAS

❶ THE PACIFIER 12:10 / 2:10 / 4:10 / 6:10 / 8:10	❹ BAHAY NI LOLA 2 12:10 / 2:10 / 4:10 / 6:10 / 8:10
❷ MISS CONGENIALITY 2 12:30 / 3:00 / 5:30 / 8:00	❺ SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD 11:20 / 1:45 / 4:10 / 6:35 / 9:00
❸ HOSTAGE 12:55 / 3:25 / 5:55 / 8:25	DOLBY DIGITAL dts SDDS

ARANETA COLISEUM SHOWS

OLPH LENTEN RETREAT (FREE ENTRY) *March 24,25 & 26, 8am to 12nn*	SHALOM LENTEN RETREAT (FREE ENTRY) *March 24,25 & 26, 2pm to 10pm*
THE CASCADES: LIVE IN MANILA *April 15 Friday, 8pm*	RIVERMAYA & KITCHIE NADAL LIVE! *April 16, Saturday, 8pm*
MARTIN NIEVERA & PATTI AUSTIN IN CONCERT *April 22. Friday. 8pm*	JA RULE LIVE IN MANILA *April 23. Saturday. 8pm*

CENTER EVENTS

FORNARINA CLEARANCE SALE	*Get up to 50% off on clothes, shoes and accessories.* *Upper Ground Floor, Gateway Mall* *ongoing until April 15*
VAN HEUSEN DRESS SHIRT SALE	*Get up to 50% off on assorted dress shirts.* *Ground Floor, Gateway Mall* *ongoing until March 31*
OLYMPIC VILLAGE SUMMER PROMO	*Get a FREE pair of shades for every P1000 purchase.* *Ground Floor, Gateway Mall* *ongoing until March 31*
GUARANA LIVE!	*Groove to the swinging samba beat of this renowned Latin band!* *Friday & Saturday. 9.30 pm onwards* *The Gazebo, Gateway Mall*

LOG ON TO www.aranetacenter.net FOR MORE DETAILS OR TO SUBSCRIBE TO OUR WEEKLY E-MAIL ENTERTAINMENT UPDATES

AYALA CENTER GLORIETTA ALABANG TOWN CENTER AYALA CENTER CEBU **LoveMall!**

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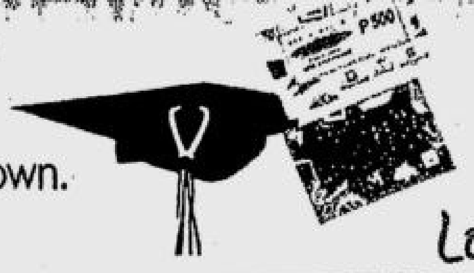

This time, let him decide on his own.

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and Supermarket at Market! Market!

AYALACENTER **LoveMall!**

AYALA GREENBELT

Catch Sybil Live! as she sings her hit songs
Make it Easy, Don't Make me Over
April 7,2005

At the Activity Center

GLORIETTA	ALABANG TOWN CENTER	AYALA CENTER CEBU
A Magical Easter **(A whole day Easter celebration)** **March 27, 2005**	Easter Fun at Town March 27, 2005	**Adonai Asian Academy's** **8th Commencement Exercises** March 23, 2005

Onstage

REPERTORY PHILIPPINES presents
The Little Shop of Horrors
at REP's GLOBE THEATER
for the Month of March

AyalaMUSEUM

Visit the New Ayala Museum located
beside Greenbelt 4 along Makati Avenue.
For inquiries, please call 757-7117.

AYALA CINEMAS

AYALA CINEMAS THX

Movie schedules may change without prior notice. For verification call 729 7777

G4	GLORIETTA 4	1 ROBOTS	2 THE PACIFIER	THX HOSTAGE 12:50, 3:15, 5:40, 8:05, 10:30 GUARANTEED SEATS	
		4 CONFIDENCE	5 SPANGLISH	6 MISS CONGENIALITY 2	7 HITCH
G1	GLORIETTA 1	1 ROBOTS	2 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD		
		3 THE PACIFIER	4 BAHAY NI LOLA 2		
ATC	ALABANG TOWN CENTER	THX 1 ROBOTS	2 HOSTAGE	3 HITCH	
		4 THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST	5 MILLION DOLLAR BABY		
ACC	ALABANG TOWN CENTER	1 HITCH	2 ROBOTS	3 THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA	
		4 HOSTAGE	5		
GB1	GRENBELT 1	1 ROBOTS 11:30, 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30			
		2 SPANGLISH 11:20, 1:55, 4:30, 7:05, 9:40			
GB3	GREENBELT 1	THX 1 THE PACIFIER 1 05, 3.10, 5 15, 7.20, 9 25, 11 30 GUARANTEED SEATS	THX 2 MISS CONGENIALITY 2 1.30, 4.00, 6 30, 9 00, 11 30 GUARANTEED SEATS	3 CONFIDENCE 1:05, 3.10, 5 15, 7.20,9 25, 11:30 GUARANTEED SEATS	
		4 SPANGLISH 1.00, 3.35, 6.10, 8.45, 11 20 GUARANTEED SEATS	5 ROBOTS 12 30, 2 30, 4.30, 6 30,8.30,10 30 GUARANTEED SEATS		

FROM THE CREATORS OF ICE AGE
ROBOTS
www.robotsmovie.com

NOW SHOWING AT

AYALA CINEMAS

For screening schedules, call 729-7777

Reserve your seats by texting SURESEATS GB3 or SURESEATS G4 to 2333 (Globe) or 211 (Smart). Or log on to www.sureseats.com for web reservation.

MTRCB Rating: General Audiences

20th Century Fox

SNEAK PREVIEWS AT AYALA CINEMAS

vinDIESEL
thePACIFIER

MTRCB Rating: G
MARCH 21, 22 & 23

Sandra Bullock
miss Congeniality 2
Armed and Fabulous

MTRCB Rating: PG-13
MARCH 22 & 23

For screening schedule, call 729-7777.

All-Digital Cinemas

MARKET! MARKET!

The *fun* is in the finds

Developed and managed by Ayala Land, Inc.

Movies are subject to change without prior notice.
Customer Service Hotline: 886-7515

Free Seating Cinemas: P70.00

① Constantine
② Cursed
③ Shaolin vs. Evil Dead
④ Bahay ni Lola 2

Guaranteed Seats Cinemas: P90.00

⑤ Hitch
⑥ Hostage
⑦ Robots

EVENTS! EVENTS!

Pamilyang OFWs-SMEs

EXPO 2005 AT MARKET! MARKET!
March 19-22, 2005 (Saturday-Tuesday)
11:00am-9:00pm Activity Center, Market! Market!
A special trade/exhibit fair for the empowerment
of OFW and SME families,
with guest speakers like Hon. Roilo S. Golez
and Hon. Freddie Tinga of Taguig.

Customer Service text hotline: 0917 6095900
Customer Service text hotline: Glorietta - 752 7272; from 10am to 8pm
Greenbelt - 752 4853; from 11am to 12mn

Alabang Town Center - 842 2782; from 10am to 8pm
Ayala Center Cebu - (032) 231 5342 loc 324

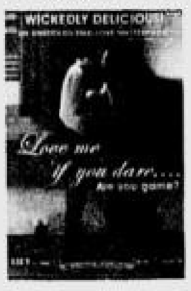
Reserve your seats by texting SURESEATS GB3 or SURESEATS GB4 to 2333(Globe) or 211 (Smart) or log on to www.sureseats.com for web reservations.

SM CINEMA movietime

TO ALL SM CINEMA PATRONS, ALL SM BRANCHES WILL BE CLOSED FROM MARCH 24-25 EXCEPT FOR SM BAGUIO WHERE THE FOLLOWING MOVIES WILL BE SHOWN:

HITCH
CONSTANTINE
RACING STRIPES
MASK 2: SON OF THE MASK

SM CINEMA EXCLUSIVE



WICKEDLY DELICIOUS
Love me if you dare.... Are you game?

LOVE ME IF YOU DARE
MTRCB RATING: R 13

little BLACK BOOK

LITTLE BLACK BOOK
MTRCB Rating: PG 13

UP COMING MOVIES

Sandra Bullock
Miss Congeniality 2

MISS CONGENIALITY 2
MTRCB Rating: PG 13

FOR INFORMATION ON MOVIE LISTING, MTRCB RATING, SCREENING, SCHEDULES AND THE LATEST HAPPENINGS AT SM CINEMA

☎ CALLUS@ 833-9999

VISITUS@ www.smcinema.co

GUARANTEED SEATS

the podium cinema

1. **ROBOTS**
11:50 FS / 12.20 MF / 2:25 / 4:30 / 6:35
8:40 / 10 15 LFS / 10 45 LMF / 12 20 END
2. **MS. CONGENIALITY 2**
12.40 FS / 1 10 MF / 3.35 / 6 35
8:25 / 10:20 LFS / 10:50 LMP / 12 45 END

☎ 633-8878

sm megamall cinema 1

little BLACK BOOK
11:45 FS / 12.15 MF / 2:30 / 4.45
6:30 LFS / 7:00 LMF / 8.45 END

☎ 633-1901

sm cebu cinema 1

PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
11.30 MF / 2:00 / 4.30 / 7:00
9:22 LFS / 9:30 LMF / 11:50 END

☎ (032) 231-3878

METRO MANILA

sm megamall

1 LITTLE BLACK BOOK smcinemaexclusive
2 HOSTAGE
3 THE PACIFIER
4 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
5 ROBOTS
6 CONFIDENCE
7 HITCH
8 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
9 SHAOLIN v.s EVIL DEAD
10 RESERVED
11 RESERVED
12 RESERVED

sm city fairview

1 FINAL CUT
2 CURSED
3 SON OF THE MASK
4 HOSTAGE
5 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
6 THE PACIFIER
7 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
8 ROBOTS
9 SHAOLIN v.s EVIL DEAD
10 CONSTANTINE
11 HITCH
12 MILLION DOLLAR BABY

sm city north edsa

1 RESERVED
2 RESERVED
3 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
4 CURSED
5 HOSTAGE
6 ROBOTS
7 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
8 THE PACIFIER

sm city manila

1 THE PACIFIER
2 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
3 LOVE ME IF YOU DARE smcinemaexclusive
4 ROBOTS
5 HITCH
6 CONFIDENCE
7 HOSTAGE
8 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
9 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
10 SHAOLIN v.s EVIL DEAD
11 CURSED
12 CONSTANTINE

sm city sta. mesa

1 RESERVED
2 RESERVED
3 RESERVED
4 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
5 THE PACIFIER
6 SHAOLIN v.s EVIL DEAD
7 ROBOTS
8 HOSTAGE
9 HITCH
10 MS. CONGENIALITY 2

sm city southmall

1 HOSTAGE
2 CURSED
3 RESERVED
4 RESERVED
5 HITCH
6 SHAOLIN v.s EVIL DEAD
7 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
8 THE PACIFIER
9 SHAOLIN v.s EVIL DEAD
10 MS CONGENIALITY 2

sm city bicutan

1 THE PACIFIER
2 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
3 ROBOTS
4 MS. CONGENIALITY 2

sm cinema tutuban

1 RESERVED
2 RESERVED
3 RESERVED
4 RESERVED

sm supercenter sucat

1 ROBOTS
2 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
3 MS CONGENIALITY 2
4 THE PACIFIER

LUZON

sm city pampanga

1 SON OF THE MASK
2 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
3 THE FINAL CUT
4 HITCH
5 ROBOTS
6 BAHAY NI LOLA 2

sm city baguio

1 CONSTANTINE
2 UP BAGUIO FILM FESTIVAL
3 RACING STRIPES
4 HITCH

sm city batangas

1 SON OF THE MASK
2 CONSTANTINE
3 HITCH
4 MAD HOUSE

sm city dasmariñas

1 ROBOTS
2 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
3 CURSED
4 THE PACIFIER

sm city marilao

1 CONSTANTINE
2 LEMONY SNICKET'S A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS
3 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
4 SON OF THE MASK

sm city bacoor

1 CONSTANTINE
2 THE PACIFIER
3 ROBOTS
4 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
5 HOSTAGE
6 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
7 MS. CONGENIALITY 2
8 CURSED

sm city lucena

1 SON OF THE MASK
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 INFECTION
4 CONSTANTINE

VISAYAS AND MINDANAO

sm city cebu

1 PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
2 ROBOTS
3 RESERVED
4 RESERVED
5 BAHAY NI LOLA 2
6 BIRHEN NG MANAOAG
7 HOSTAGE
8 HITCH

sm city iloilo

1 BIRHEN NG MANAOAG
2 RESERVED
3 SON OF THE MASK
4 MILLION DOLLAR BABY
5 THE AVIATOR
6 ROBOTS
7 RESERVED
8 GOSPEL OF JOHN

sm city davao

1 ROBOTS
2 ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13
3 BIRHEN NG MANAOAG
4 LEMONY SNICKET'S A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS
5 PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
6 HITCH

sm city cagayan de oro

1 THE AVIATOR
2 BIRHEN NG MANAOAG
3 INFECTION
4 FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

sm preview

SNEAK PREVIEWS
OF

miss Congeniality 2
Armed and Fabulous

ON
MARCH 22 AND 23
AT
ALL SM METRO
MANILA
BRANCHES!

REGULAR SHOWING
STARTS ON MARCH 26

Sandra Bullock
miss Congeniality 2
Armed and Fabulous

MTRCB RATING: PG-13

ENTERTAINMENT

star group of cinemas movie guide IN DOLBY DIGITAL SOUND

starmall EDSA-SHAW
Tel. No. 726.61.50
3 Bahay ni Lola
4 Shaolin vs Evil Dead
5 Renovation

METROPOLIS star ALABANG
Tel. No. 850.42.85
1 Pacifier
2 Robots
3 Hostage
4 Bahay ni Lola
5 Shaolin vs Evil Dead
6 Ms. Congeniality 2

starmall LAS PIÑAS
Tel. No. 873.50.04
1 Constantine
2 Reserved

For movie schedules visit www.clickthecity.com

'Samara' earns $36M to win this week

LOS ANGELES—Naomi Watts ran rings around the competition as her horror sequel "The Ring 2," released in the Philippines as "Samara," took in $36 million to debut as the top weekend movie.

The movie's take was more than double the $15 million that the original surprise horror hit grossed at its 2002 opening.

"Robots," the previous weekend's No. 1 movie, slipped to second place with $21.8 million, lifting its 10-day total to $66.9 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Disney's family hit "The Pacifier" held up well in third place with $12.5 million, pushing its three-week total to $72.3 million.

But with those two child-friendly flicks remaining strong draws, Disney's new family movie "Ice Princess" had a tough time finding a toehold. "Ice Princess," starring Michelle Trachtenberg as a science geek who abandons the physics classroom to pursue a new dream as a figure skater, premiered at No. 4 with $7 million.

Trailers for "Ice Princess" ran before "The Pacifier," so audiences who caught that movie may be encouraged to see "Ice Princess" during spring break or over the Easter holiday, said Chuck Viane, Disney head of distribution.

"It's a double-edged sword. It helps you and it hurts you a little," Viane said.

For thrill seekers, "The Ring 2," offers Watts returning to her role as a journalist and single mom trying to save herself and her son from the curse of a killer videotape, whose viewers die horrible deaths within a week.

The original, based on a Japanese hit, became a word-of-mouth surprise success, holding strong as it steadily climbed to a $129 million total domestic gross. The sequel is expected to mirror the pattern of other horror hits, which open big, but take steep drops.

"Sequels just don't play the same way. You have to expect a good drop," said Jim Tharp, head of distribution for DreamWorks, which released both "Ring" flicks. "Obviously, we would hope to get that $100 million club, but we don't do any of those projections this early in the game."

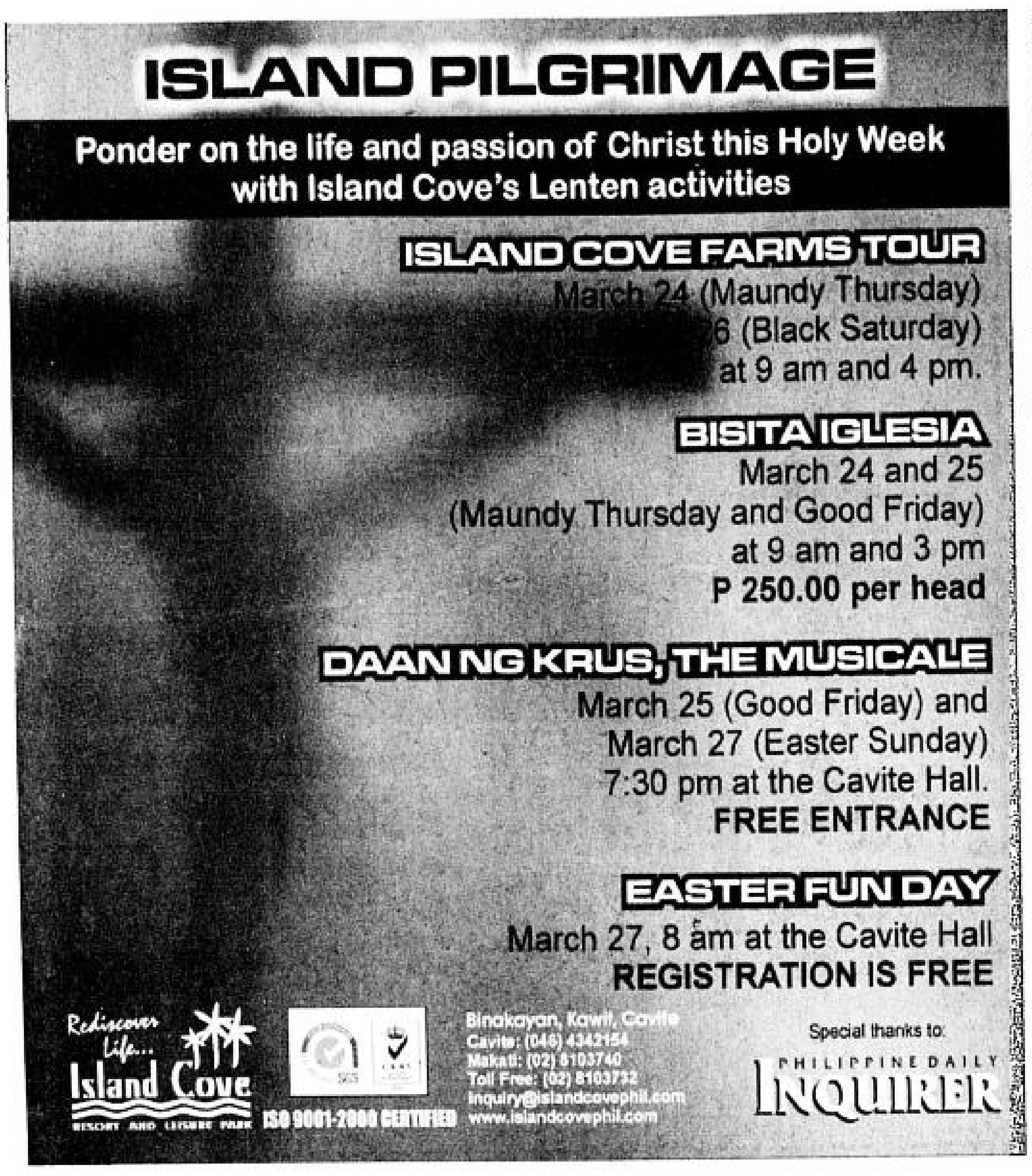
Woody Allen's "Melinda and Melinda"—which stars Radha Mitchell in dual roles in a comic and tragic retelling of the same story—opened strongly with $74,048 on three screens at one New York City theater.

The film, which co-stars Will Ferrell (news), Chloe Sevigny and Amanda Peet, gradually expands into nationwide release through April 8. *(See review on this page.)*

The weekend's top 10 and their estimated ticket sales at North American theaters, according to Exhibitor Relations Co. Inc.:

1) "The Ring 2," $36 million
2) "Robots," $21.8 million
3) "The Pacifier," $12.5 million
4) "Ice Princess," $7 million
5) "Hitch," $6.6 million
6) "Be Cool," $5.8 million
7) "Hostage," $5.797 million
8) "Million Dollar Baby," $4.1 million
9) "Diary of a Mad Black Woman," $3.5 million
10) "Constantine," $2.3 million

AP



ISLAND PILGRIMAGE

Ponder on the life and passion of Christ this Holy Week with Island Cove's Lenten activities

ISLAND COVE FARMS TOUR
March 24 (Maundy Thursday)
6 (Black Saturday)
at 9 am and 4 pm.

BISITA IGLESIA
March 24 and 25
(Maundy Thursday and Good Friday)
at 9 am and 3 pm
P 250.00 per head

DAAN NG KRUS, THE MUSICALE
March 25 (Good Friday) and
March 27 (Easter Sunday)
7:30 pm at the Cavite Hall.
FREE ENTRANCE

EASTER FUN DAY
March 27, 8 am at the Cavite Hall
REGISTRATION IS FREE

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Special thanks to:
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

WOODY Allen and wife Soon-Yi Previn arrive for the New York premiere. REUTERS

WILL Ferrell and Radha Mitchell star in "Melinda and Melinda." AP

Two-faced movie by Woody Allen

REVIEW

The comic parts aren't funny and the tragic parts aren't sad—that's precisely the point

NEW YORK—So here's the gimmick in Woody Allen's "Melinda and Melinda."

Two stories—one comic and one tragic—are interwoven with some common details and themes. Each focuses on a woman named Melinda who's a little mysterious and wayward. Each features cheating spouses. Both are set against that classic Allen backdrop: the streets and social circles of sophisticated, artistic, angst-ridden New York.

It's a fabulous idea that nearly collapses under the weight of its own pretensions, though the film is buoyed slightly and sporadically by a couple of performances, notably that of Radha Mitchell as Melinda (and Melinda).

The comic parts aren't that funny and the tragic parts aren't that dramatic. And yes, that's Allen's point. Several characters in the eclectic ensemble make some sort of reference to the fact that comedy and tragedy aren't so different, that tears of joy and sorrow essentially taste the same.

But that pervasive homogeneity blankets the film in blandness and prevents it from fully engaging the audience. Allen fans, though, will probably find comfort in the familiar rhythm and dialogue as the writer-director lets both stories unfurl.

In the dramatic version, Melinda arrives on a bus, looking disheveled, and interrupts a dinner party being thrown by a couple of her college friends, husband and wife Lee, an aspiring actor, and Laurel, a music teacher from the Upper East Side (played by Jonny Lee Miller and Chloe Sevigny).

She tells a tale of woe about losing her husband and children because of some stupid mistakes she made and ends up getting involved with the pianist (Chiwetel Ejiofor from "Dirty Pretty Things") who's performing at a cocktail party she attends.

In the comedic version, Melinda walks upstairs to her neighbors' apartment, looking as if she's about to pass out from too many sleeping pills, and interrupts a dinner party being thrown by husband and wife Hobie, an aspiring actor, and Susan, an independent film director who's trying to raise money for her movie "The Castration Sonatas" (Will Ferrell and Amanda Peet).

She tells a tale of woe about losing her fiance and ends up being sought-after by a few men, notably Hobie, the on-screen Woody Allen figure in the equation.

Ferrell isn't doing a dead-on impression of Allen, like Kenneth Branagh in "Celebrity," but he definitely captures the filmmaker's jittery, self-loathing image, and (naturally) gets the film's best lines.

When an obscenely wealthy dentist tries to one-up Hobie by asking him what he does to exercise, Hobie deadpans, "Tiddly winks and the occasional anxiety attack." That the exchange takes place at the dentist's Hamptons mansion brings to mind Allen's own miserable experience as Alvy Singer at a Hollywood party in "Annie Hall."

For every moment like that, though, there are too many others that are just as self-conscious, but in a way that clangs. A character comments in each story line, "I'm running out of obsequious banter." Laurel opines wistfully, "You can't go through life rubbing lamps and wishing."

Who talks like this, besides characters in a Woody Allen film?

Mitchell, though, has a raw vitality that jumps off the screen, and the strength of her dual performances calls to mind that of another Australian actress, Naomi Watts, in "Mulholland Drive."

But redeeming the entire movie is too much work for one woman—even for a woman who gets two cracks at it. *AP*

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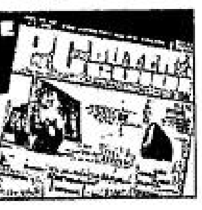

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Sa tibay, hindi basta-basta bumibigay.

RP posts trade surplus of $170M

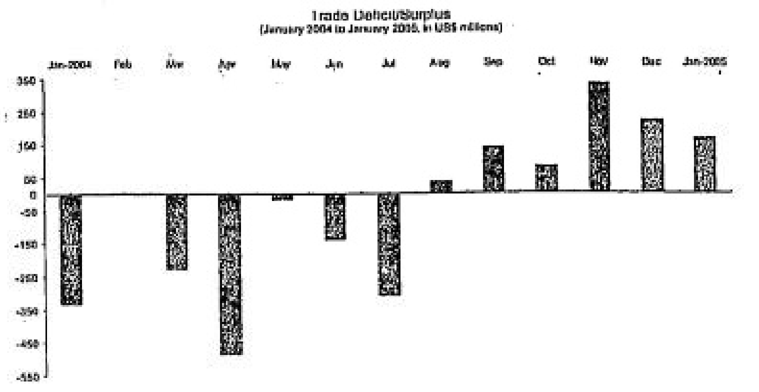
By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PHILIPPINES posted a trade surplus of $170 million in January as strong export earnings allowed a sharp turnaround from the $336-million trade deficit a year ago.

The country's import bill, however, declined by 2.1 percent to $3.11 billion in January from a year ago, the National Statistics Office reported yesterday.

Inflow from exports in January amounted to $3.28 billion, growing year-on-year by 15.4 percent.

The country's cautious import spending despite the robust export performance was due to concerns among Philippine manufacturers that high global oil prices could temper demand for exports, some analysts said.



As the country's top exports use imported inputs, a slowdown in importation is an indicator of confidence on how exports would fare over the near term.

For instance, payments for electronic products, which accounted for $1.32 billion or 42.6 percent of the total import bill for January, declined by 6.8 percent from last year.

Other top imports were mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials ($409.7 million); industrial machinery and equipment ($134.94 million); iron and steel ($113.32 million), and transport equipment ($96.49 million).

Raw materials and intermediate goods accounted for 41.2 percent of the total expenditures while capital goods comprised 35.8 percent.

"Our export sector is already moving ahead at double-digit growth rates. However, there is still much scope for accelerating it further," said Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Deputy Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. during the signing of the memorandum of agreement on the BSP's P10-million grant to the Export Development Council.

The EDC was created in 1994 to strengthen and institutionalize the national export drive and its supporting framework.

The country's total trade in goods for January amounted to $6.39 billion, rising by 6.1 percent from a year ago.

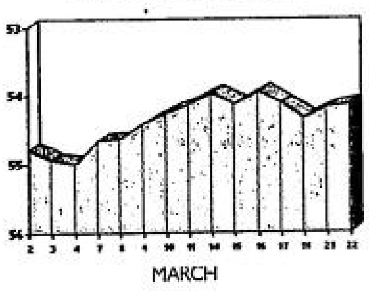
Japan was the country's biggest source of imports, cornering 16.6 percent of the total bill but the

RP POSTS/ B2

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES

PESO-DOLLAR RATE



₱54.125 = $1

As of 5 p.m., March 22, 2005

¥104.93 = $1

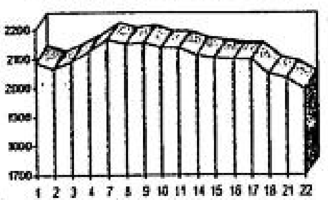
As of 5 p.m., March 22, 2005

GOLD: $430.70-431.20

per ounce Hong Kong, March 22, 2005

STOCK MARKET

Shares close 1.7% lower



SHARE prices closed 1.7 percent lower yesterday as investors locked-in profits ahead of the Easter holidays, dealers said.

They said investors were cautious amid reports of possible terrorist attacks by the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf group during the long weekend that starts today.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index shed 34.63 points to 1,999.15 after trading between 1,999.08 and 2,033.78.

Volume reached 1.06 billion shares valued at P5.09 billion. The broader all-shares index fell 8.04 points to 1,195.13. Losers beat gainers 65 to 19, with 54 stocks unchanged.

The market will be closed from today for Easter and resume trading next Monday.

"The shortened trading week and the lack of fresh positive leads are driving investors away from the market, which is testing support at 2,000 points," Accord Capital Equities analyst Lawrence de Leon said. *AFP*

2-month budget gap up 16% at ₱40B

THE NATIONAL government incurred a budget deficit of P40.1 billion in the first two months of the year, about 16 percent higher than the level in the same period last year.

The Department of Finance yesterday said in a statement that the January-February shortfall was only 51 percent of the P77.8-billion deficit ceiling for the first quarter.

For the month of February alone, the deficit stood at P23.5 billion as expenditures worth P72.3 billion eclipsed revenues amounting to P48.8 billion.

Of total revenues for February, the Bureau of Internal Revenue pumped in P31.7 billion while the Bureau of Customs, Bureau of Treasury and other offices contributed P9.2 billion, P4.1 billion and P3.8 billion, respectively.

For the two-month period, total revenues amounted to P113.1 billion against the P97.74 billion collected in the same period last year. This accounted for 69 percent of the P163.34 billion programmed collection for the first quarter.

Expenditures during the first two months amounted to P153.2 billion against the P132.31 billion spending a year ago. This accounted for 63.5 percent of the spending limit for the first quarter.

The bulk of the government's expenditures during the two-month period went to interest payments (P56.86 billion), allotment to local government units (23.94 billion) and net lending (P1.63 billion).

The BIR posted a 13-percent annual growth in revenues to P73.7 billion or about 66 percent of its target for the quarter.

Revenues of the Customs bureau were up by 9 percent to P19.8 billion. *Doris C. Dumlao*

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Sluggish market pulls down SMIC share price on debut

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

HOLDING firm SM Investments Corp. (SMIC) debuted on the stock market yesterday, marking the biggest initial public offering in Asia, so far, this year.

However, yesterday's trading of SMIC shares fizzled, dragged by the delay in the passage of the value-added tax (VAT) reform measure, threats of mall bombings and the shortened trading week. The market will be closed starting today for the Lenten break. It will reopen on Monday.

Pulled down by the broader market's 1.7-percent decline, SMIC closed at P241 per share, down from the opening price of P248 per share and the offer price of P250.

Others said the $530-million IPO by SM Investments—the holding firm for tycoon Henry Sy's interests in malls, property, banking and leisure—might have been priced too high.

SMIC churned in trades worth P1.46 billion, involving 6.1 million shares.

The company raised P28.75 billion ($530 million) from an international roadshow held earlier.

"We are looking at the long-term [prospects for the stock], or the benefits for shareholder in the long-term. The ups and downs now are not a major concern for us. Our concern is the medium- to long-term prospects of our company," Henry Sy Jr., co-vice chair of SMIC, said in a press briefing after the company's simultaneous listing rites at the Tektite Tower in Ortigas and the Ayala Tower One.

SMIC debuted two days after Manila Water Co. Inc. listed on the PSE.

"It is a process we are going through. The lower House and the Senate believe we should have a VAT measure. They are just making sure that the measure we have is the best for the country. In any legislation, there is a process you have to go through. We are hopeful that by next month, we will have a VAT law," Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima told reporters yesterday.

Sy said SMIC had lined up several real-estate projects this year after raising P29 billion from its IPO. These include possible projects in its Tagaytay properties, 5,200-hectare seaside property called Hacienda Looc in Nasugbu, Batangas and the SM Central Business Park, one of the six reclaimed islands along the coast of Manila Bay.

Even without the IPO , the company is confident it will be able to pay $300 million worth of notes maturing in October 2007, SMIC chief financial office Jose Sio said.

Consistent with the expansion of its mall network, the Sy family is investing in malls in China.

(FROM L to R) PSE chair Peter Favila, SM group finance officer Jose Sio, SM Prime president Hans Sy, Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima, taipan Henry Sy, SEC Chair Fe Barin and SMIC co-chair Henry Sy Jr. ring the ceremonial bell on the PSE trading floor. RUDY ESPERAS

Gov't seeks financial adviser for PNB sale

THE NATIONAL government said it would soon appoint a financial adviser for the sale of its shares in Philippine National Bank (PNB).

Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima said the bank had been informed about this. However, the government has yet to draw up a shortlist of investment banks for this purpose but it aims to complete the process as soon as possible.

The government and the Lucio Tan group are set to sell two-thirds of their joint holdings in PNB. The sale of their holdings would fully privatize the bank.

Purisima earlier said the Department of Finance, which was in charge of the government's privatization program, was targeting to sell the PNB shares on or before Sept. 16, or the expiration of a shareholders' agreement entered into by the two major shareholders of the bank.

Under the agreement, the government is given the option to initiate the joint sale of the stakes held by the state and the Tan group, equivalent to 45 percent each. The public holds the remaining 5 percent.

The Tan group, however, could buy the government's stake if it wanted to. *Elizabeth L. Sanchez*

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of March 22, 2005)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.2	52,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	27.5	27.5	26.5	27	713,600
Bank of the Phil. Islands	57	57	54.5	54.5	1,012,400
China Banking Corp.	660	660	660	660	100
Citystate Savings Bank	17.25	17.25	17.25	17.25	1,000
Export and Ind. Bank Inc.	0.77	0.77	0.75	0.75	2,770,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	48	48	47.5	47.5	6,600
International Exch. Bank	18.75	18.75	18.5	18.5	175,000
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	35.5	36.5	35.5	36	166,600
Phil. Bank of Comm. A	98	98	98	98	500
Philippine National Bank	36.5	36.5	35	35.5	86,900
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	14.25	14.25	14.25	14.25	1,000
Union Bank of the Phil.	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	41,000
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	325,000
Phil. Stock Exchange Inc.	150	150	150	150	1,090
Sun Life Financial Inc.	1720	1720	1720	1720	300
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	16	16	16	16	150,200
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	1.26	1.28	1.22	1.26	4,008,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	900	900	890	890	26,110
Ipeople Inc.	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.85	155,000
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.0525	0.0525	0.05	0.05	5,000,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.0525	0.0525	0.0525	0.0525	2,100,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp.	2.04	2.04	2.04	2.04	3,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	3.45	3.5	3.45	3.5	1,666,000
Transpacific Broadcast	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	23,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	1430	1435	1425	1430	92,790
Ivantage Corp.	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	1,260,000
Philweb Corp.	0.021	0.021	0.019	0.02	117,700,000
POWER, ENERGY & OTHER UTILITIES					
Manila Electric Co. A	19.75	19.75	19.75	19.75	30,000
Manila Electric Co. B	28.5	28.5	27	27.5	933,800
Manila Water Co. Inc.	6.8	6.8	6.4	6.4	42,036,000
Petron Corp.	3.9	3.9	3.75	3.75	5,681,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	1.52	1.54	1.48	1.5	1,121,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	1.7	1.76	1.68	1.7	1,039,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	8	8.1	8	8	2,739,000
Keppel Phils. Marine Inc.	0.59	0.59	0.58	0.58	70,000
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	50,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Engineering Equip. Inc.	0.65	0.65	0.65	0.65	360,000
Holcim Philippines Inc.	3.65	3.65	3.6	3.65	726,000
Phil Nat'l Const. Corp.	3.25	3.25	3.2	3.2	35,000
Republic Cement Corp.	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	60,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Cosmos Bottling Corp.	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.1	17,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	36	36	35	35	114,100
Jollibee Foods Corp.	28	28.5	27.5	27.5	65,900
Pancake House Inc.	1.16	1.16	1.16	1.16	30,000
RFM Corp.	0.98	0.98	0.96	0.96	100,000
San Miguel Corp. A	55.5	56	55.5	56	40,800
San Miguel Corp. B	81	81	80	81	122,500
Universal Robina Corp.	12	12	12	12	105,000
Vitarich Corp.	0.29	0.3	0.29	0.3	650,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.011	0.011	0.01	0.011	249,000,000
Abacus Con Res & Hdg B	0.012	0.013	0.012	0.013	42,500,000
Ayala Corp.	7.8	7.8	7.5	7.6	3,476,000
Abgitiz Equity Ventures	4.95	4.95	4.85	4.85	984,000
A. Soriano Corp.	2.14	2.14	2.06	2.06	234,000
APC Group Inc.	0.49	0.49	0.38	0.38	1,800,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.007	0.0075	0.007	0.0075	35,000,000
Aries Prime Res. Inc.	1.38	1.38	1.38	1.38	6,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.66	1.7	1.66	1.7	40,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp.	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	2,000
Balabac Resources & Hldgs	0.8	0.8	0.78	0.78	110,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	24.5	25	24.25	24.75	50,500
Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	200,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	1.16	1.16	1.08	1.1	25,966,000
A Brown Company Inc.	0.96	0.96	0.96	0.96	50,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	680,000
Southeast Asian Cement	0.46	0.46	0.45	0.45	2,110,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	3.65	3.7	3.55	3.6	1,837,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.055	0.055	0.055	0.055	3,000,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	1.62	1.62	1.58	1.58	630,000
Fil-Hispano Holdings Corp.	10	10	10	10	356,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	57.5	57.5	54.5	54.5	879,500
House Of Investments Inc.	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1,125,000
Ionics Inc.	1.58	1.6	1.58	1.58	70,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.65	355,000
Macroasia Corp.	2.04	2.04	2.02	2.02	118,000
Megaworld Corp.	1.6	1.6	1.56	1.56	3,840,000
Multitech Inv. Corp.	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.47	550,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.53	0.53	0.52	0.52	13,950,000
Polar Property Holdings	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	3,000
East Asia Power Res. Corp.	0.34	0.34	0.33	0.33	600,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	1.06	1.1	1.06	1.1	106,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.61	0.61	0.61	0.61	260,000
SM Investments Corp.	248	248	234	241	6,104,400
Tanduay Holdings Inc.	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	8,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	660,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.34	0.34	0.32	0.34	1,260,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Corro-Coat Inc.	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	14,000
Matsushita Elec Phil Corp.	7.9	8	7.9	8	25,000
Music Semiconductors Corp.	1.62	1.7	1.6	1.7	187,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.92	10,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.14	2,580,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp.	1.26	1.32	1.24	1.3	19,975,000
Fairmont Holdings Inc.	1	1.06	1	1	1,180,000
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	1.48	1.54	1.48	1.54	1,462,000
Premiere Ent. Prod. Inc.	0.29	0.3	0.28	0.28	3,710,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (Pdr)	15.5	15.5	15.25	15.5	362,500
PLDT (10% Pref) Series S	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	100
PLDT (10% Pref) Series T	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	3,100
PLDT (10% Pref) Series V	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	3,900
PLDT (10% Pref) Series W	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	6,200
PLDT 10% Pref Series Aa	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	3,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	8.6	8.6	8.1	8.1	5,482,000
Cityland Development Corp.	1.68	1.68	1.68	1.68	47,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	1.02	1.04	1.02	1.04	2,927,000
C & P Homes Inc.	0.31	0.32	0.3	0.32	4,900,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.31	0.31	0.3	0.3	1,480,000
EIB Realty Developers Inc.	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19	50,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.52	0.52	0.49	0.5	26,140,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.72	1.74	1.66	1.66	9,780,000
Highlands Prime Inc.	2.4	2.4	2.36	2.36	150,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.28	170,000
MRC Allied Ind. Inc.	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.22	200,000
Philippine Estates Corp.	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.19	790,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	4.85	4.85	4.65	4.65	950,000
Phil Realty and Holdings	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	100,000
SM Development Corp.	1.74	1.74	1.66	1.68	412,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	7.8	7.9	7.8	7.9	3,171,000
MINING					
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	10,200,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	5.8	5.9	5.8	5.8	152,000
Benguet Corp. A	8.2	8.7	8.2	8.5	70,000
Benguet Corp. B	22	24	22	24	19,200
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.38	0.38	0.37	0.38	4,920,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.42	0.42	0.41	0.41	1,110,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.018	0.018	0.018	0.018	19,000,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.025	0.025	0.024	0.025	78,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.008	0.0085	0.008	0.008	167,000,000
Philex Mining Corp. A	1.16	1.16	1.16	1.16	300,000
Philex Mining Corp. B	1.4	1.4	1.38	1.4	350,000
Semirara Mining Corp.	40	40.5	39.5	39.5	2,105,400
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.29	400,000
OIL					
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.007	0.007	0.007	0.007	80,000,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	100,000
The Philodrill Corp. B	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	200,000
Pacifica	0.013	0.013	0.013	0.013	10,000,000
Petroenergy Res. Corp.	2.95	2.95	2.95	2.95	10,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.18	0.185	0.17	0.18	11,460,000
Vulcan Ind'l	0.38	0.42	0.38	0.42	120,000

Providing hope, care for cancer patients

CORPORATE CITIZEN

By Abigail L. Ho

IGNORANCE is bliss, so the cliché goes. But for cancer patients who know virtually nothing about their condition, ignorance can spell death.

While advancements in medicine over the years have given rise to a wider network of information on various diseases, cancer included, many who are diagnosed with some form of cancer often lose hope upon hearing that they have the illness.

But this should not be the case, says Cynthia Allanigue, cancer survivor and I Can Serve (Information on Breast Cancer and Other Services) Foundation member.

"Cancer patients now actually have more chances of living long and healthy lives, but access to information is important," Allanigue says. "Cancer patients find empowerment in themselves when they're equipped with knowledge."

Philippine Cancer Society Inc. (PCSI) executive director Quintin Tan adds that there really is a strong correlation between cancer survival and the amount of information available to the patients.

He explains that the increasing rate of cancer-related deaths in the country can be attributed to the low level of cancer awareness among Filipinos.

Data from the Department of Health show that four people die of cancer every hour. The numbers increase by the thousands each year.

Knowledge is power

The lack of readily accessible information about cancer is what prompted Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche Group, through local arm Roche Philippines Inc., to develop a website that will not only provide adequate information on various forms of cancer but will also serve as a venue for cancer patients to share their stories of struggle and survival.

Formed in cooperation with the PCSI and the Department of Health, the C-Network website (www.cnetwork.org.ph) is now helping cancer patients deal with their disease without focusing on the morbid end that cancer victims usually worry about.

"The C-Network seeks to promote education among cancer patients and their families," says Warwick Bedwell, Roche Philippines general manager. "It aims to empower cancer patients to be more proactive, armed with the knowledge that cancer can be prevented and cured. We want to remove the fear and pain related to the disease."

The first step to winning the fight against cancer, after all, is awareness and understanding as this can lead to prevention and even cure, he says.

Accessible information

The C-Network campaign, through its website and through partnerships with various commercial establishments for collateral postings, is now providing cancer patients a treasure trove of resources—from background information and modern treatment options to innovations for various types of cancer.

A more positive attitude towards cancer treatment, prevention and cure is what the C-Network campaign aims to promote. Through its network of cancer-focused individuals and organizations, the advocacy campaign aims to enhance the education of cancer patients and their families about the illness.

BEDWELL

Even those without cancer and who do not know anyone with cancer can benefit from the C-Network as it also provides information on cancer prevention.

Using the Internet as a tool, the C-Network hopes to spread cancer awareness and change the way Filipinos look at the disease.

To achieve its goals and objectives, the C-Network campaign has three main components: Caring (Cancer Action and Research Information Network Group), Cure (Cancer Understanding and Rewarding Engagements) and Comfort (Community of Friends and Organizations Reaching Out Together).

Under the Caring component, the C-Network will help facilitate a stronger relationship between cancer patients by providing them with a venue to share their experiences.

The C-Network website actually allows individuals to post stories of how they are struggling with cancer and how they have triumphed over the disease.

"We will share with Filipino cancer patients stories of survival, victory and hope; shed light on cancer misconceptions in order to remove the fear and the doubts; and strengthen what other cancer advocacy groups have started and are continuing to do," says Bedwell.

The stories from fellow cancer patients and survivors can help people who are dealing with the illness cope with what they are going through.

The most difficult for a cancer patient, Allanigue says, is to deal with the illness alone.

Under the Cure aspect, closer relationships are built with the medical community. Such ties are important as members of the medical community serve as main partners in the treatment and prevention of cancer.

From members of the medical community come insights on modern cancer treatments and innovations. This knowledge will help cancer patients determine what kind of treatments are best for them.

The Comfort component seeks to create a community of committed individuals who will help facilitate interaction and information exchange between cancer patients and members of the medical community.

With this kind of relationship in place, cancer patients and their families will always be armed with fresh knowledge straight from the experts.

Armed for battle

In a nutshell, the C-Network hopes to build bridges that will help cancer patients and their loved ones cope with what they have to go through, give the medical community the chance to share their much-needed insights on the disease, and instill in Filipinos the knowledge that having cancer does not mean the end of the world.

True, cancer is no easy thing to accept and to handle. But armed with the right knowledge, relationships and stories of inspiration, cancer patients can now live better and more hope-filled lives.

Like what I Can Serve Foundation president and founder Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala says, it is a cancer patient's responsibility to arm himself with all the proper information as this will affect his life and those of his loved ones.

And that information is exactly what the C-Network gives.

(L-R) LEYS MASANGCAY and Betchy Inocencio from Roche Phil., Dr. Susana Salvador from the Phil. Cancer Society, Dr. Cora Ngelangel from JRMMC-DOH/Philippine Society of Medical Oncologists, Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala from I Can Serve Foundation, Sylvia Palma from the Philippine Cancer Society, Vivian Ocampo from Roche Phils. and Dr. Kelly Salvador from the Phil. Cancer Society.

CURRENCIES

March 22, 2005 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.759244	1.000000	54.2660
Japan	Yen	0.007225	0.009516	0.5164
United Kingdom	Pound	1.440817	1.897700	102.9806
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.097349	0.128218	6.9579
Switzerland	Franc	0.644629	0.849041	46.0741
Canada	Dollar	0.627008	0.825832	44.8146
Singapore	Dollar	0.466022	0.613798	33.3084
Australia	Dollar	0.596936	0.786225	42.6653
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.013962	2.652590	143.9454
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.202454	0.266652	14.4701
Brunei	Dollar	0.464596	0.611920	33.2065
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000080	0.000106	0.0058
Thailand	Baht	0.019686	0.025928	1.4070
UAE	Dirham	0.206721	0.272272	14.7751
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.317100	71.4737
Argentina	Peso	0.260461	0.343053	18.6161
Brazil	Real	0.279185	0.367715	19.9544
Denmark	Kroner	0.134275	0.176853	9.5971
India	Rupee	0.017410	0.022931	1.2444
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.199828	0.263193	14.2824
Mexico	New Peso	0.067518	0.088928	4.8258
New Zealand	Dollar	0.559337	0.736703	39.9779
Norway	Kroner	0.122712	0.161624	8.7707
Pakistan	Rupee	0.012790	0.016846	0.9142
South Africa	Rand	0.124978	0.164609	8.9327
Korea	Won	0.000752	0.000991	0.0538
Sweden	Kroner	0.109594	0.144346	7.8331
Syria	Pound	0.014626	0.019264	1.0454
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.024374	0.032103	1.7421

RP posts...

From page B1

$515.13 million worth of shipment from the world's second largest economy fell by 10.7 percent from a year ago.

The United States had a share of 15.6 percent, with shipments at $485.75 million, while Taiwan was third $251.61 million.

Other major sources of imports were Singapore ($236.58 million); People's Republic of China ($211.12 million); Republic of Korea ($173.42 million); Hong Kong ($141.42 million); Saudi Arabia ($137.63 million); Malaysia ($136.78 million), and Thailand ($111.11 million).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2 firms get ₱5.6M in loan to boost alternative power sources

By Abigail L. Ho

THE PHILIPPINE National Oil Co. Energy Development Corp. (PNOC-EDC) recently granted almost P5.6 million worth of loans to two firms that would promote alternative fuel sources and cut down reliance on commercial grid-generated electricity.

The PNOC-EDC yesterday said in a statement that the two firms—Jover Light Industries Inc. and Buffalo Industries Philippines Inc—got the loans through its Decentralized Energy Systems (DES) project.

The two firms were granted the loans because their businesses used technologies supported by the PNOC-EDC's DES project.

Jover Light was given a loan of almost P4.3 million, allowing the company to increase the commercialization of its JB Recirculating Grain Dryer and JB Flat Bed Grain Dryer.

The company's grain dryers were biomass-fired, using rice hulls as fuel.

Buffalo Industries, on the other hand, was given access to a loan worth almost P1.3 million to promote Light Eco, an energy-saving technology for fluorescent lamps.

DES is defined as an energy system that produces power on its own, without having to depend on commercial power grid systems.

Such systems rely on traditional and alternative fuels like petroleum and agricultural wastes, respectively.

Biogas systems, briquetted biomass materials, isolated cogeneration systems and photovoltaic systems are just some examples of DES technologies.

The PNOC-EDC, under the DES project, 'is providing financial aid to entrepreneurs engaged in the production, marketing and use of DES technologies like photovoltaics, biogas systems, briquetted solid fuels, biomass-fired dryers or ovens, wind energy conversion systems, solar water heaters, micro or mini hydropower systems and energy conservation systems.

In the past 20 years, the PNOC-EDC had granted loans to 19 entrepreneurs under the DES project.

Apart from the cash component of the loan, businesses that get funding assistance from the PNOC-EDC would also be given technical, marketing and promotional assistance.

In the near term, the DES project hopes to give entrepreneurs access to much needed financial aid for their new and renewable energy (NRE) businesses.

"We need Filipino entrepreneurs who are willing to take risks in projects that will greatly contribute to energy savings and help supply the energy requirement of the country," said Benito Bengzon, PNOC-EDC board director. "The rewards of the DES project in the long run will be seen in the sustainability of NRE businesses in the country."

Suzuki plans to put up new motorcycle plant in Laguna

By Ronnel W. Domingo

MOTORCYCLE maker Suzuki Philippines Inc. is putting up a new manufacturing plant in Laguna to replace its existing facility in Pasig City to answer the growing demand for bikes.

Rolando F. Cruz, SPI general manager, said the new plant would increase the company's capacity to 10,000 units a month from 6,000 units.

"This would require an initial outlay of P10 million for expenses on the structure and additional development of the site," Cruz said.

He added that subsequent capital outlay on the assembly lines for bikes and engines would cost more, but he did not give an amount.

Cruz explained that SPI had started to develop a 13-hectare property in Canlubang in 1997. But the project was shelved for a while when the Asian financial crisis set in.

According to Cruz, who is also president of the Motorcycle Development Program Participants Association, local demand for bikes has been continually increasing since the industry recovered from the crisis in 1999.

"We posted our biggest growth in terms of sales volume in 2004, with 59 percent at a total of 409,000 units," he said.

Cruz said that while different industry sales figures had been reported, the official MDPPA projection had sales reaching the 650,000 mark by end-2005, an increase of another 59 percent.

Also, the group expects local demand to reach a million units by 2008 due to increasing fuel costs and fares for public utility vehicles, aside from worsening traffic congestion, Cruz said.

At the same time, he said, the market segment representing tricycle operators seemed to have reached a plateau.

As such, Cruz said, the industry group would soon embark on efforts to jack up demand for the "solo-riding" segment.

In line with this, the MDPPA is launching next month the 2005 Motorcycle Lifestyle Roadshow, which would provide symposia and lectures on riding, motorcycle safety, and proper maintenance.

The roadshow will cover selected cities such as Zamboanga, Legaspi, Iloilo and Laoag.

Founded in 1973, the association groups Kawasaki Motors Corp., Honda Philippines Inc., Suzuki Philippines Inc., Kymco Pilipinas Inc., Norkis Trading Co. Inc. (Yamaha), Victoria Motors (Loncin) and East World Motor Ind. Corp. (Motor Star).

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SARA LEE DIRECT SELLING GLOBAL HEAD
LAUDS PHILIPPINE UNIT ON ITS 12TH YEAR

Sara Lee
Direct Se

Sara Lee Direct Selling Worldwide Group President Simon Hemus recently congratulated Sara Lee Direct Selling - Philippines during its highly-successful 12th anniversary celebration last February.

Mr. Hemus visited Manila and personally lauded the Sara Lee Direct Selling - Philippines management group, led by General Manager Ricky Sy, as well as its thousands of dealers who have consistently garnered merits for their outstanding sales performance. He also gave his warm wishes to the 67 Sara Lee Direct Selling's top-sellers and executives awarded with a trip to Australia.

"It should be noted that the global Direct Selling division delivered record sales and profits in Fiscal Year 2004 – of which Sara Lee Direct Selling - Philippines is a major contributor," Mr. Hemus proudly declared. "Over the last twelve years, the company has accomplished so much in establishing itself as one of the leading direct selling companies in the Philippines, and a key player in the global arena."

PLDT wants to keep ₱10/call scheme

By Clarissa S. Batino

AS PHILIPPINE Long Distance Telephone Co. plans to make its P10-per-call promo permanent, Globe Telecom Inc. has come up with a new buffet price scheme for its landline subscribers.

This early, PLDT is preparing to counter the move by filing a complaint against Globe before the National Telecommunications Commission.

Froilan Castelo, Globe assistant vice president, said the company was offering a permanent within network toll-free national direct dialing for customers who would apply between March 21 and April 19.

According to an industry source, Globe's move amounted to a "blatant disregard of NTC rules."

"How can [Globe] offer it forever if their NTC approval is only until March 30?" the source asked. "[Globe] should get an approval first before coming out with ads and promises."

Globe's "one country, one rate," promo, which was launched in January, had lapsed.

The company's unlimited NDD offer of P650 a month prompted numerous provincial carriers to lodge complaints. They accused Globe, and even PLDT, of predatory pricing.

Globe said its existing 300,000 fixed-line subscribers could easily avail of the new promo by registering within the 30-day period.

"We want to entice more subscribers to the landline because competition, even in the fixed-line business, has intensified," Castelo said. "We are doing this to be more competitive."

Second-rank Globe ended 2004 with a net income of P11.3 billion and 12.5 million wireless subscribers. The joint venture of Ayala Corp. and Singapore Telecom is trailing telco giant PLDT, whose profit last year reached P25 billion.

PLDT's wireless units ended 2004 with 19.2 million subscribers.

Globe's postpaid landline monthly subscription costs between P250 and P700 for residential customers, and between P300 and P1,200 for businesses. Rates in provinces are cheaper than in the metropolis.

In Metro Manila, the monthly rate for Globe landline is P650.

As for PLDT, the company's head of retail Butch Jimenez said that requests to continue with the P10-per-call within network promo kept on pouring in. The promo had been extended several times. It is supposed to end on April 11.

"With the market's strong positive reaction to the offer, we are thinking of making this a permanent plan," Jimenez said. "[Subscribers] like the product's simplicity and affordable price."

But the telco giant said it might keep the promo open-ended given the intense competition even in the fixed-line business.

The P10-per-call rate applies to all PLDT calls anywhere in the country, as well as to all Smart and Talk N' Text mobile subscribers, regardless of how long the call takes.

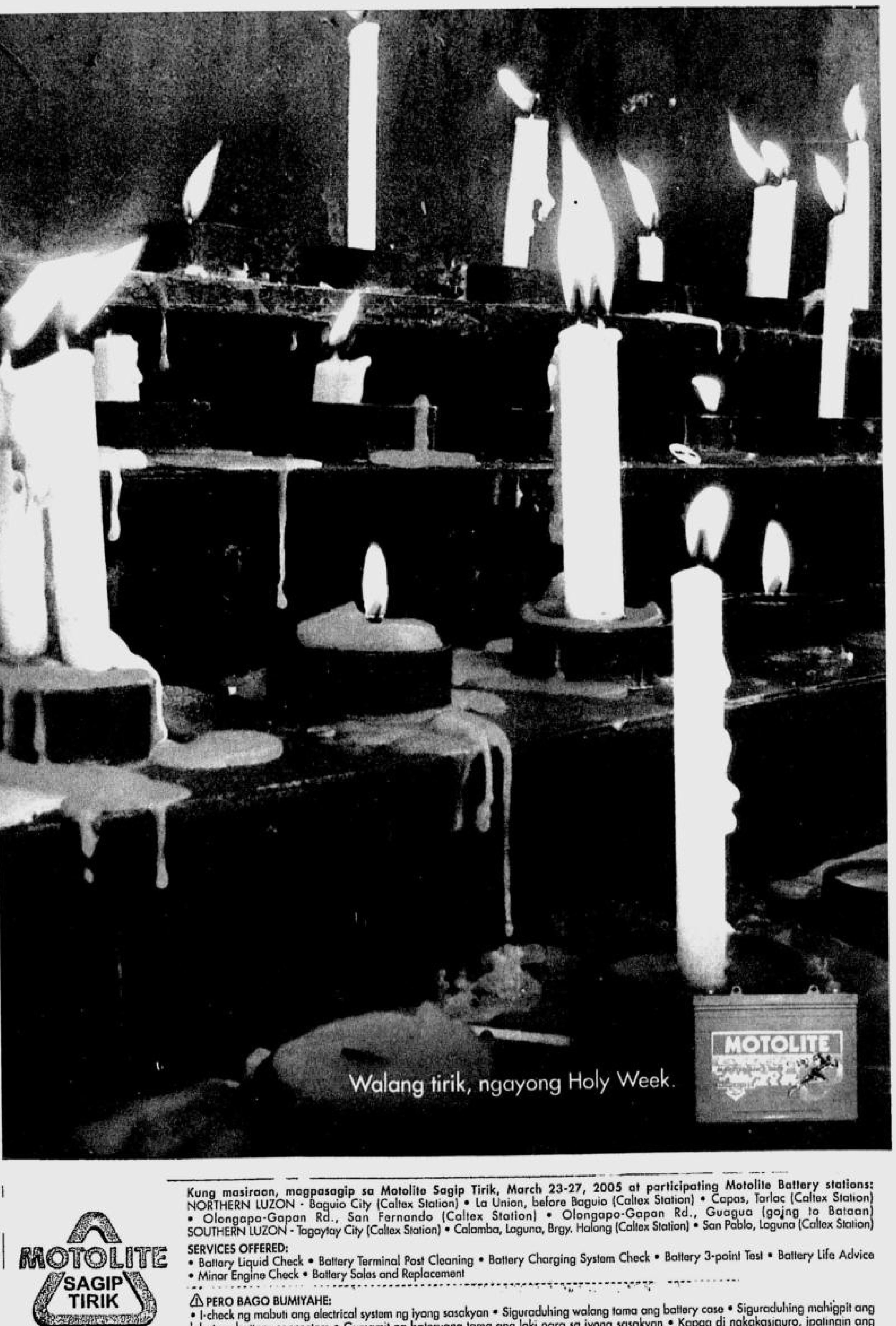
PLDT has more than 22 million fixed-line and wireless customers all over the country. Jimenez said calls to PLDT's customer service hotline, 171, have increased from 5,000 each day to over 35,000. Most inquiries are related to the P10-per-call deal.

The PLDT retail head said there had been a strong uptake in applications for PLDT landlines. The company is even offering free imported cordless phones to new subscribers.

"We hope to end the year with a net station gain, as against a net station loss that PLDT has experienced over the last five years," said Jimenez.

Jimenez added that provincial cities serviced by other carriers have passed local resolutions encouraging PLDT to enter their city. He said three weeks after the promo started on Feb. 14, the number of calls using PLDT jumped to an average of 540,000 a day from about 390,000.

Aside from PLDT and Globelines, others offering unlimited call deals are Sun Cellular, Touch Mobile, Smart and Talk N' Text.



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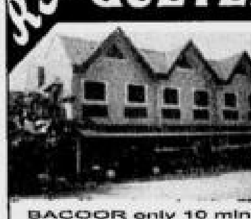

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RESIDENTIAL nr UP Ateneo 204m² to 816m² P8,500/m² 09189235216

RIZAL

Beverly Hills 862m² 842-5621

REAL ESTATE FOR SALE

LOT

PROVINCIAL

★100% TAGAYTAY ★
240m²-up 3,568m² 134T D/P 6 Mos to pay 6T Mo. nr Taal Vista 6609372

TAGAYTAY

Ridgewood Tagaytay along Main Road 6414323 0919-7927249

LAGUNA

CALAMBA 3Has. 842-5621

SOUTH PT. 180m²
Nr Cabuyao Exit 9125847

MEMORIAL LOT

LOY-MK FLY EST.@2.5M 8386645

LOY-PQ/MKN 8 SLOTS 09164834182

REAL ESTATE FOR RENT

CONDO/TWNHSE

MANILA

BAYBRIDGE HOME NR NAGTAHAN BLK2 LOT2 7361925

QUEZON CITY

NICE CONDO: 3BR, 3TB Maids Room w/TB, Secured 913-7267 • 913-7270 -Roy

Studio P3.2T Frisco QC Tel 9317159 / 4563754

Studio Type 30m² Nr F'view & Mrket P4T 7181885 09179665772

APARTMENT

PASAY

Nice w/ Bedroom 4009293

PASAY NR EDSA MRT LRT 1-3 BR W/PARKING 2318973

QUEZON CITY

STUDIO UNIT Call 9115162

WAREHOUSE/ FACTORY

Cubao fabshp P25T 725-7342

Cubao wkshop P25T 8974697

Cubao wrkshp P25T 8974697

ROOM & BOARD

El Grande Inn, Paranaque 8257524 daily weekly 24hr

•FURNISH PASAY 8337923•

Mla, Daily, Wkly 7118679

BUSINESS RENTAL

BURGUNDY PLAZA KATIPUNAN Q.C. FRNT ATENEO FA50 m² (res) 76&110m² (ideal for SPA, GYM) 9289541 / .7361925

Nr Trabajo Mrkt Samp. Mla 0917-8906317 • 749-7119

RESORT LEASE/ RENT

Pansol Hot Spring priv 7767507

LOAN & MORTGAGE

BUSINESS . DOCTOR 524-3197

OFFICE SPACE FOR RENT

Taft Ave nr Faura Office-Table Space for Rent 404-2207 800-6667

REAL ESTATE FOR SALE OR RENT

APARTMENT FOR SALE/RENT

APT 4 SALE/RENT 4500-7000 Bedspace 1500 M/F Call AJ 5610960 / 09167144320 • 09204136412

TRANSPORTATION FOR SALE

CARS

FORD

RUSH SALE!
2003Expedition 1.8 Automatic Emma 632-1554 • 634-3294

KIA

'97Sportage Cola Blue 4WD Bnew Pirelli Tire 230T neg 0927-6917739

NISSAN

2002 Mdl 55Tkm. M/T 4x2 0919-8707359 • 0919-3552515

TOYOTA

'99Crla XL P240T A1Cond Compre Insurnce 0917-8578056

OTHER CAR BRANDS

Pajero Prado Trooper Surf Delica Town - Lite - Hi Ace etc Finance T-In 712-7539

SPECIAL CARS

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CARS FOR RENT

CAR (M/T A/T) VAN (8-15P) T 9386198 4270344

Bnew Car Alts Vans 8254058

CarsVans CoasterBus 422-9296

CARS/VANS/BRIDAL 8969956

Cheap Van Rental 9330311

•L300 VAN TRevo 9139185•

P800/L3 9136710 / 4333682

RENT A VAN
0917-5444721 / 6424405

REVO w/driver 9272821

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w/ aromatheraphy
751-0491•0917-8536992

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VANS•CARS•726-8388

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L300•CRV•REVO
HONDA•VIOS•ALTIS•LYNX•CRLA
MLA : 536-8822 • 303-0789
Q.C.: 426-2278 • 426-4084

CAR LOAN

1.5% Car Loan 5344441

1.5% CARLOAN 373-6519

1.5% CARLOAN 788-0361

1.5% Easy Car Loan 4112547/48

1.5% Easy Car Loan 3748765

1.5% Easy Carloan 7815352/55

1.5% Fast Car Loan 6560140

1.5% w/oTaking Car 3650974/75

1.5% w/oTaking Car 7228942-43

•1HR Fast Car Loan 7125202•

2% w/o Taking Car 7262780

2% w/oTaking Car 8906630/33

2% w/oTaking Car 8870490/95

2% w/oTaking Car 8959454

2% w/oTaking Car 7221021

2% w/oTaking Car 3732081/82

2% w/out taking car 6315577

TRANSPORTATION FOR RENT

CAR LOAN

2% w/out taking car 6667685

GENERAL ITEMS FOR SALE

AUDIO/ VIDEO

Canon EOS5Quarts Digital Lens28-105mm 75-300mm Speedlite Flash 430EZ P60K 0917-6222941 • Hse. 426-4574

BUY/SELL

Pru-Life Coll Edu Plan Ex-Sch 320T Neg. 0917-3395109

HEALTH & BEAUTY

GET BACK INTO SHAPE! w/HERBALIFE #3762613

PETS

DALMTN champline w/papers 09183921360 Las Pinas area

DOG TRAINER 0919-3419012

Dog Trainer 0919-2050952

Germ Shepherd Fem 11mos Bigbone ShowType Good 4 Breeding • 0917-8516885

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5633742 0917-8473744

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& Other Swiss Watches Fast Cash
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Other WATCHES, BEST PRICE
0917-8142309 • 7269687
7220433 • 4123543

NATIONAL POWER CORPORATION
Diliman, Quezon City

INVITATION TO BID FOR THE SALE OF USED/WASTE OIL

"AS IS, WHERE IS", "TAKE ALL" AND "CLEAN UP"

DATE OF BIDDING: **April 12, 2005**, 2:00 PM, Solarium Hall, Building-1, Ground Floor NPC-Head Office, Agham Road corner Quezon Ave., Diliman, Q.C.

The National Power Corporation will conduct public bidding for the sale of the following:

ITEM	DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION	MIN. BID PRICE
-1-	**One-Year Contract of Sale for Used/Waste Oil Generation at Panay Diesel Power Plant Complex in Dingle, Iloilo Province.** Important: This Disposal/Sale is limited only to accredited EMB-DENR Hazardous Waste TSD Facility Operators (Treaters) and subject to Post Qualification and Inspection of actual operating facility prior to award of contract.	P4.00 Per Liter

ALL BIDS MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. PROPOSAL BOND DEPOSIT IN THE FORM OF CASH OR MANAGER'S/ CASHIER'S CHECK IN THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF P120,000.00;
2. LATEST INCOME TAX RETURN (2003 or 2004) ORIGINAL OR CERTIFIED XEROX COPY FOR THE BIDDER OR AN AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF THE COMPANY;
3. VALID EMB-DENR ACCREDITATION FOR TSD FACILITY OPERATOR (TREATER) WITH THE ACCREDITED HAZARDOUS WASTE TRANSPORTER.

All interested parties who wish to secure the bid forms for this public bidding must present a valid Income Tax Return (2003/2004 original or BIR certified copy) and valid identification card with picture (such as Company IDs, Passport, Driver's License, PRC Licensure Card, etc.), and must present original EMB-DENR accreditations.

Interested parties who wish to participate in the public bidding may secure the bid form at P1,000.00/set from Mr. S.V. Lomuntad, Jr./Mr. Al Plata at MMD, Ground Floor, Bldg.-1, NPC Head Office, Corner Agham Road and Quezon Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City or call telephone no. 924-5384. Deadline for issuance of the bid forms is until 4:30 p.m., April 11, 2005.

For the materials Management Department

(Sgd.) FELIX B. TACATA, JR.
OIC, MMD

(PDI - March 21, 22 & 23, 2005)

GENERAL ITEMS FOR SALE

MISCELLANEOUS

COLUMBARY VAULTS / CRYPTS
In Visayas Avenue, Quezon City
Call 0917-8491952 • 7232975
From P70,000 - P100,000
(Discounts available)
4 Urns In 1 Vault

PUBLIC NOTICES

LEGAL NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the estate of the late VICTORIA ESPIRITU REYES & the late EMILIANO E. REYES, SR. were settled by their heirs through an extrajudicial settlement of estate which was settled by their heirs through an extrajudical settlement acknowledged before Not. Pub. Atlee T. Viray of City of San Fernando, Pampanga as per Doc. 375; Page 75, Bk. 85, Series of 2005. (PDI 3/23, 30 & 4/6, '05)

Notice is hereby given that the Estate of the late RICHARD CRUZ SARITO was extra-judicially settled among his heirs and entered in the Notarial Register of Notary Public Atty. Hernand T. Gutierrez under Doc. No. 354; Page No. 161; Book III; Series of 2005
PDI-March 23, 30 & April 6, 2005)

A publisher of several widely circulated monthly trade magazines, based in Quezon City, is looking for

ADVERTISING SALESMAN

- Graduate of a 4-year course from a reputable college/university
- Preferably with experience but not a requirement
- Able to communicate well, both oral and written

Qualified applicants may send in their comprehensive bio-data with recent photo indicating their desired compensation to:

P.O. Box 1295, Manila
Or apply in person at:
626 G. Araneta Avenue, Quezon City

PUBLIC NOTICES

NOTICE OF LOSS

Notice is hereby given that PR No. 5537-5550 and OR No. 1447-1450 of Creative Designs, Inc has been reported lost on Marh 13, 2005 Issuance of these receipts will be null and void

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

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BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

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RESTAURANT Loc. in Dapitan St. infront UST, Good Location Good Furnitures & Equipment Nancy 731-3402, 0917-2067392

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

MALE/FEMALE

SALES REP (074)-446-8644

Wanted
- ACCOUNTING GRAD fresh Grad. accepted
- Willing to be trained w/ pay submit resume at unit 443 Cityland Tower Chino Roces Ave. Pasong Tamo, Makati Tel# 8170838 or 43

2005 ADVERTISING SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES (ASAP)'S OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS. Raul Alvarez, 2005 Adboard chair presided the induction of the 2005 officers and directors of their association. Elected officers are: Khalil Khodr, Jr., chairman; Edgar Navalta, president; Von Villareal, VP-Internal; Rick Hawthorne, VP-External; Cherry Salazar, treasurer; Remedios Bautista, secretary; and elected directors are Edgar Arcilla, Alex Raul Blay, Cergen D. Go, Solomon V. Malca, Alvin Manacsa, Meryl Graham Schlachterman, Jose Sy, Allen Velez and Fernando Villaroman.

Looking for Dog Food Distributors
FOR SUPERMARKET
Preferably existing dealers
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Quality imported products.
Great Business Opportunity. High Commissions.
Please call Gilbert Tang 0917-5308945

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722-1155

TransCo
National Transmission Corporation

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

PD Ref. No.: PB050211-EL0010

The **NATIONAL TRANSMISSION CORPORATION, BIDS AND AWARDS COMMITTEE FOR HEAD OFFICE**, wishes to invite interested parties to apply for eligibility and to bid on the items listed below:

Schedule	Item Description	PR NO.	Approved Budget
I	MOBILE PC	3 units	P 375,000.00
II	DESKTOP PC	20 units	P 1,700,000.00
III	LASERJET PRINTER (Standalone)	2 units	P 70,000.00
IV	LASERJET PRINTER	1 unit	P 48,000.00
V	INKJET PRINTER	1 unit	P 18,000.00
VI	SCANNER	1 unit	P 15,000.00
VII	DVD WRITER, EXTERNAL	1 unit	P 30,000.00
VIII	HARD DRIVE, EXTERNAL	1 unit	P 20,000.00
IX	SERVER	1 unit	P 300,000.00

TOTAL ABC: P 2,576,000.00

1. Bid Documents will be available for issuance starting **March 17, 2005 to April 14, 2005** at the BAC Secretariat Office, National Transmission Corporation, Materials Management Division, Ground Floor, TransCo Main Bldg., Power Center, Quezon Avenue corner BIR Road, Diliman, Quezon City, upon payment of non-refundable fee of **Five Hundred Pesos (P500.00)** per set.
2. Deadline for submission, receipt and opening of bids shall be on or before **10:00 a.m of April 15, 2005** at the Admin Conference Room, Ground Floor, TransCo Main Bldg., Power Center, Quezon Ave. corner BIR Road, Diliman, Quezon City. Of the date is declared non-working day, the new deadline for submission shall be announced through a Bid Bulletin. Submission of documents must be clear, legible and readable. Late submission and/or incomplete application shall not be accepted.
3. Pre-bid conference will be held on **April 4, 2005 at 2:00 p.m.** at the Admin Conference Room, Ground Floor, TransCo Main Bldg., Power Center, Quezon Ave. corner BIR Road, Diliman, Quezon City.
4. All particulars relative to the eligibility, bidding, evaluation of bids and award of contract shall be governed by the Implementing Rules and Regulations-A of Republic Act 9184.
5. TransCo reserves the right to reject any Application for Eligibility or all bids without offering any reasons, waive any required formality therein, and to make an award to the bidder whose proposal is most advantageous to the government.
6. Additional information shall be furnished upon request. All communications should be addressed to the undersigned at the aforementioned address.

(Sgd.) **ANTONIO G. LABAYANI**
Chairman, Bids and Award Committee

(PDI - March 17 & 23, 2005)

ILOCOS NORTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.
Suyo, Dingras, Ilocos Norte, PHILIPPINES 2913
Tel. No. (077) 784-75-46 & 47; 784-71-26 & ☎ Fax No. (077) 784-71-25

INVITATION FOR BIDS

The Ilocos Norte Electric Cooperative, Inc. through its Pre-Qualification, Bids and Awards committee invites suppliers, manufacturers, distributors to submit their proposals for the supply delivery and installation of a 10 MVA 69/13.2 KV Power substation complete with 69 KV protection, metering, and a three feeder secondary protection in conformity with the Philippine Distribution Code. Technical and Financial proposals shall be the basis of the award. The Financial terms shall not exceed five years either on a Lease Purchase, rent-to-own, financing terms basis.

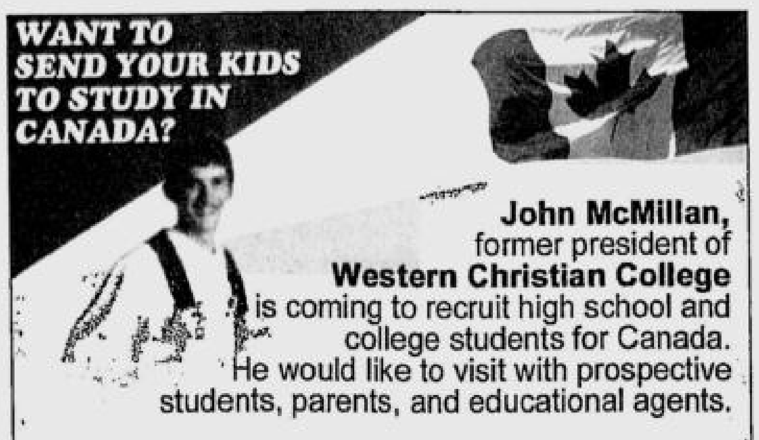
Deadline of Submission is on April 08, 2005 and to be addressed to:

THE PBAC CHAIRMAN
Ilocos Norte Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Suyo, Dingras, Ilocos Norte

ATTENTION: ENGR. RENATO A. BALINTEC

(Sgd.) **ROMILLAS C. PASCUAL**
General Manager

(PDI – March 23, 2005)



WANT TO SEND YOUR KIDS TO STUDY IN CANADA?

John McMillan,
former president of
Western Christian College
is coming to recruit high school and college students for Canada.
He would like to visit with prospective students, parents, and educational agents.

- For Manila only
- Possible partial scholarships and will help with visa documents.
- Interview on March 28 & 29, 2005, 7:00 p.m. at Makati City Church of Christ., 1598 Archimedes Street, Brgy. Lapaz, Makati City.

For immediate appointment or more information, please contact
text 0917-3249380 or email: mpn@mozcom.com
You may also visit **Western Christian College** website
at www.westernchristian.ca

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM
East Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City

Visit the SSS website for Bid Invitations

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY & TO BID

SSS ID PROCESSING CENTER MAINTENANCE SERVICE

The **SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM** is inviting bidders to apply for eligibility & to bid for a one-year maintenance service (hardware and software) of SSS' Fingerprint Identification and Mailing Systems.

The aforementioned services are aimed at providing the SSS a preventive and proactive means of ensuring the reasonable level of performance of its ID Processing Center.

The bid is composed of two (2) lots:

Lot 1	Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) Data Capture Workstation Software and the Central AFIS Software System
Lot 2	Mailing System & its peripherals & the supply of consumables

Approved Budget for the Contract:

Lot 1	P73.9M
Lot 2	P8.0M
Source of Fund	CY2005 Approved Budget for ID System Maintenance
Contract Duration	To commence within fifteen (15) calendar days upon receipt of Notice to Proceed

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES:

Particulars	Date	Venue
Issuance of eligibility requirements	March 28, 2005 to April 8, 2005	BAC Secretariat, 6th Floor, SSS Main Bldg.
Deadline of submission of eligibility requirements	April 14, 2005	BAC Secretariat, 6th Floor, SSS Main Bldg.
Issuance of Bidding Documents to Eligible Bidders upon payment of a non-refundable fee as follows • Lot 1 - P50,000.00 • Lot 2 - P5,000.00	April 18, 2005	BAC Secretariat, 6th Floor, SSS Main Bldg.
Pre-bid Conference	April 22, 2005 2:00 p.m.	Bidding Room, 6th Floor, SSS Main Bldg.
Submission & Opening of Bids shall be announced and confirmed through a Bid Bulletin.		

For any inquiry, please call telephone numbers 922-2991 or 920-6401 local 5490/5491.

This bidding shall be governed by the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 9184, otherwise known as the "Government Procurement Reform Act".

The SSS reserves the right to reject any or all bids without offering any reason, to waive any formality or technicality, and to award to any bidder whose proposal is deemed most advantageous to the SSS. The SSS neither assumes any obligation for any loss whatsoever that may be incurred by the bidders in the preparation of their respective bids, nor does the SSS guarantee that an award will be made.

THE CHAIRMAN
BIDS & AWARDS COMMITTEE

(PDI - March 23, 2005)

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

Tel. No. 256-1690 CEBU CITY Telefax No. 254-2935

NOTICE OF SALE

Pursuant to the provisions of Sections 2601 and 2607 of the Tariff and Customs Code of the Philippines, as amended as well as CMO No. 5-2003, there will be a Public Auction Sale to be conducted at the Port of Cebu on **April 1, 2005 at 10:00 o'clock** in the morning of the hereunder articles. Said goods shall be available for public viewing on March 30, 2005. For further inquiry, please contact the following telephone numbers 255-5188 or 254-9752.

In the event of a failed bidding for want of bidders or lack of an acceptable bid, there shall be a 2nd bidding on the next business day.

Articles	Floor Price
A. Rice	
19,147 bags of Rice as is where is subject to final counting	P 15.00 per kilo.
B. Motor Vehicles	
1. One (1) unit Isuzu Bighorn (RIID) Model 1992 3.2 (V6)	P 450,000.00
2. BMW 75 OIL 4 Doors (RHD) Model 1988	P 400,000.00
3. Toyota 4 Doors Sedan (LHD)	P 350,000.00
4. Citroen ZX 1.61 4 Doors Sedan (LHD)	P 200,000.00
5. Kawasaki Motorcycle Model 1985 (1,000 cc) No engine, tank damage, seat & peering	P 10,000.00

Requirements for participating bidders:

a) P2,000.00 registration fee;
b) Cash bond deposit of P20,000.00 either in cash or manager's check refundable to the losing bidders after closing of the auction sale; and
c) Bidders for rice must be licensed NFA retailers / wholesalers.

Registration fee and cash bond deposits are payable one (1) day before the date the actual bidding.

Port of Cebu, Philippines, 18 March 2005.

(Sgd.) **COLL. BILLY C. BIBIT**
District Collector

(PDI - March 23, 2005)

Republic of the Philippines
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

VSP-233-DOE/2005
07 March 2005

PUBLIC NOTICE NO. PN2005-03-001

Declaration of Remote and Unviable Areas Pursuant to Section 59 of the EPIRA and Rule 14 of Its Implementing Rules and Regulations

NOTICE is hereby given that the following remote and unviable areas (Annex A) have been declared open for the provision of electric service by Qualified Third Parties (QTPs) pursuant to Section 59 of the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001 otherwise known as EPIRA and Rule 14 of its Implementing Rules and Regulations. The Electric Cooperatives (ECs) having franchise obligations over these remote and unviable areas have issued the corresponding Board Resolutions allowing other electric service providers to serve these areas. Investment in any type of power supply technology will be supported; however, the use of renewable energy technologies, such as, mini-hydro system, may receive technical assistance. Appropriate level of subsidies is planned to be available to support the projects. Clustering of these areas to form mini-grids is also encouraged.

Interested parties including private entities, local government units, cooperatives and non-government organizations may obtain relevant information on these areas from the contact persons below.

Rural Electrification Administration and Management Division
Electric Power Industry Management Bureau
Department of Energy
Energy Center, Fort Bonifacio
Taguig City, Metro Manila
Telephone Numbers (632) 840-5593 or 840-2120

Attention: Mr. Noel D. Binag, Division Chief
Mr. Bienvenido C. Mendoza, Supv. Science Research Specialist

VICENTE S. PEREZ JR.
Secretary

ERRATUM

In the ad of the Department of Energy "Re: Public Notice No. PN 2005-03-001" published in this newspaper last Sunday, March 20, 2005, the signature of the Secretary Vicente S. Perez Jr., should have been indicated above his name & position.

Our apologies.

POWER SECTOR ASSETS & LIABILITIES MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

INVITATION TO BID

The Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corporation ("*PSALM*") Privatization, Bids and Awards Committee ("*Committee*") invites interested parties to participate in and bid for the privatization of the following:

600 MW Batangas Coal-Fired Thermal Power Plant located at San Rafael, Calaca, Batangas

(the "*Asset*"). The Asset is being privatized on an "*as is where is*" basis.

Interested parties are required to submit a Letter of Interest ("*LOI*") to PSALM which shall state the full name, address, telephone and fax number of the interested party, name of the principal contact, signed by an authorized representative, and with the latest audited financial statement attached to the submission. All LOIs must be received by PSALM at the PSALM Office, 2nd Floor, SGV II Building, Ayala Avenue, Makati City, not later than 5:00 p.m. on April 8, 2005 (the "*LOI Submission Deadline*"). Only interested parties that submit an LOI by the LOI Submission Deadline shall be allowed to participate further in the privatization of the Asset.

As a prerequisite to the receipt of the Bidding Package, interested parties shall execute a Confidentiality Agreement and an Undertaking pursuant to Section 78 of RA 9136, in the forms provided by PSALM, and pay a non-refundable fee in the amount of One Thousand U.S. Dollars (U.S. $ 1,000.00) (the "*Participation Fee*"). The Participation Fee shall either be in cash, manager's check or cashier's check. All bank charges, if any, shall be for the account of the interested party. The Confidentiality Agreement, Undertaking and Participation Fee must be received by PSALM on or before 5:00 p.m. of April 8, 2005 to entitle an interested party further participation in the privatization of the Asset.

The Bidding Package, which includes the bidding procedures, shall be issued during office hours (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) from April 4, 2005 until April 8, 2005 at 5:00 p.m. (the "*Deadline*") at the PSALM Office. In accordance with the bidding procedures, only interested parties who have been issued the Bidding Package by the Deadline or a consortium which includes an interested party will be allowed to participate further in the privatization of the Asset.

The schedule of the bidding activities shall be as follows:

Due Diligence	April 4, 2005, to May 13, 2005
Pre-bid Conference	April 14, 2005, 2:00 p.m. at the PSALM Office
Deadline for Receipt of Bids by PSALM	May 18, 2005, 12:00 p.m. at the PSALM Office

References to dates and times shall be based on Manila time. Should any of the above dates fall on a holiday, the deadline shall be extended to the same time of the immediately succeeding business day in Makati City.

Interested parties will be required to post a bid security equivalent to ten percent (10%) of its total bid price in the form of an irrevocable letter of credit, confirmed by a local bank and acceptable to the Committee. The bid security of the winning bidder shall be substituted by a performance security to guarantee prompt, faithful and complete performance of its obligations under the transaction. A two-envelope bidding system will be adopted. Other details of the privatization of the Asset are contained in the Bidding Package.

Letters of Interest, Confidentiality Agreements and Undertakings shall be addressed and submitted to: The Chairman, Privatization, Bids and Awards Committee, PSALM Corporation, 2nd Floor, SGV II Building, Ayala Avenue, Makati City, Philippines. Inquiries and clarifications shall be addressed to Mr. Froilan A. Tampinco at the PSALM Office or at telephone number (632) 893-8202 loc. 202 or 206, telefax number (632) 840-3896 or e-mail address fatampinco@psalm.gov.ph.

The Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any interested party or bidder or proposals or bids therefrom, or any part thereof, and/or to waive any defects contained therein and accept the offer most advantageous to the Government, without offering any reason whatsoever. It does not assume any obligation to compensate or indemnify parties for any expense or loss that they may incur as a result of their participation in the privatization process, nor does it guarantee that an award will be made. Finally, it reserves the right to modify, supplement, or change the Bidding Procedures and other aspects of the privatization process at any time, including the schedule and the venue provided herein, for any reason whatsoever and without giving prior notice. Interested parties and/or bidders will be notified subsequently of such modifications, supplements, or changes.

(Sgd.) **RAPHAEL P. M. LOTILLA**
PSALM Privatization, Bids and Awards Committee

(March 21, 22 & 23, 2005)

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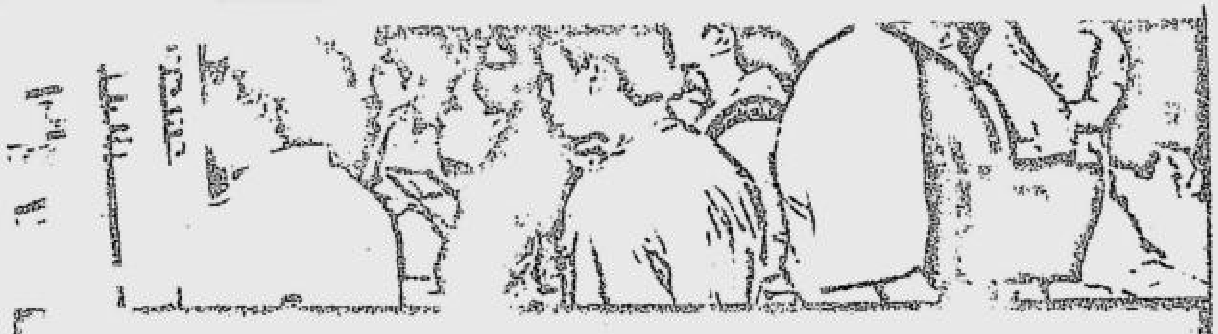
JOBZ EMPLOYMENT EXPO 2005

APRIL 28-30, 2005 MEGATRADE HALL 1, SM MEGAMALL



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Message of Thanks

His bereaved wife Citang and the whole family member of our dearly beloved

SIMEON " Momong" B. Santiago

(1914-2005)
Turo, Bocaue, Bulacan

who joined his Creator and his daughter Tita & son Victor on February 12, 2005

wish to convey our heartfelt gratitude to all those who paid their last respect and grieved with us, offered masses and prayers, sent flowers and messages of sympathy which all gave comfort at the time of our great sorrow.

To celebrate his 40th day, we request our brothers and sisters in Christ for Tatang Momong's eternal repose through our joined Celebration of the Eucharist:

DATE	CHURCH	TIME
March 15-23	St. Martin of Tours Church *Poblacion, Bocaue, Bulacan*	6:00 am
March 23	St. Michael Parish Church *Poblacion, Marilao, Bulacan*	6:00am
March 23	Queen of Angels Monastery *Binang 2nd, Bocaue, Bulacan*	6:30 am
March 23	San Gabriel Parish Church *San Gabriel, Sta. Maria, Bulacan*	6:30 am
March 23	Immaculate Concepcion Parish Church *Poblacion, Pandi, Bulacan*	6:30 am
March 23	Immaculate Concepcion Parish Church *Sta. Maria, Bulacan*	6:30 am
March 23	Sto. Nino Parish Church *Parada, Sta. Maria, Bulacan*	7:00 am
March 23	St. John The Evangelist Church *Bagbaguin, Sta. Maria, Bulacan*	5:30 pm

---

Manuela Locsin Ledesma

Loving wife of Ricardo (†)
Mother of Tony & Ruby, Jim & Lydia, Opê & Jun (†) Lopez, Monet (†)
Esto (†) & Virgie, Rene & Fortune, Al & Lyn, Iggy & Nida, & Maricar (†)
Grandmother of Arleen, Cathy, Vivian, Martin, Toby & Jerrie
Deenna, Cherry, Ricky, Bernie, Philip & Junie
Cecile, Argie, Pia, Manny, Mike, Mark & John
Lisa, Michelle, Rachelle, Ernest & Paul
RJ, Rina & Rico
Vincent, AJ, Richie & Nikki
Rencey & Via

Peacefully joined her Creator on March 21, 2005, at the age of 95.

Her cremated remains are at the Capilla del Señor, Sanctuario de San Antonio, Forbes Park, Makati City. Funeral Mass will be held on Wednesday, March 23 at 5:00 p.m.

"In peace
I shall both
lie down
and sleep
for You
alone Lord
make me
secure."
(Psalm 4:9)

Our Beloved

Dolores S. Bunag

Peacefully joined her Creator
last Sunday, March 20, 2005.

Her husband **Celso**; children **Danny**, **Ferdie**, **Beth**, **Ernie**, **Armand**, **Cherilyn**, **Fides** and **Melanie** together with their families, request for your prayers for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie at the Arlington Memorial Chapel, Araneta Avenue, Q.C. Interment will be on March 24, 3 o'clock in the afternoon at the Holy Cross Memorial Gardens.

(Please omit flowers)

RAYMUNDO AFRICA BRIONES

of Lipa City, Batangas

Born on October 6, 1956
Died on March 20, 2005

His bereaved parents, **Rafael Sr.** and **Aludia**; wife, **Ceres Macaraeg**; children, **Yasmin Claire & David Juan Viray**, **Raymond-Benedict**, **Rafael Vidal**; brothers, **Rafael Jr.** & **Fr. Froilan Renato, SSS**; sister, **Ma. Corazon**; in-laws, **Ursula Sevilla & Ulysses Galang**; nephews & nieces, uncles & aunts, cousins, and other relatives request the reader to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His cremated remains lie in state at the mortuary of St. Sebastian Cathedral in Lipa City.

Please omit flowers; masses and prayers will be appreciated.

Interment will be on March 23, 2005, Wednesday after the 3:00 p.m. Mass.

"For both in life and death, we belong to God..."

Sixth Death Anniversary of

Patricia G. Del Rosario

of Sta. Isabel, Malolos, Bulacan & Quezon City
who joined her Creator on March 25, 1999

Holy Masses will be offered today, 23rd March 2005 at the following churches:

Sto. Domingo Church, *Quezon Blvd., Q.C.*	5:00 AM
Sta. Isabel Parish Church, *Sta. Isabel, Malolos City*	6:00 AM
Barasoain Church, *Malolos City*	6:00 AM
Holy Spirit Parish, *BF Homes, Q.C.*	6:15 AM
Mount Carmel Shrine, *New Manila, Q.C.*	7:00 AM
St. Joseph Shrine, *Aurora Blvd., Q.C.*	12:00 NN
Malolos Cathedral, *Malolos City*	5:30 PM
Christ the King Seminary, *Rodriguez Blvd., Q.C.*	6:00 PM
Our Lady of Miraculous Medal Church, *Q.C.*	6:30 PM

The FAMILY request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

SYLVIA CELERIAN VIDA

of Binangonan, Rizal
and Sikatuna Village, Q.C.

Peacefully joined our Lord
on March 22, 2005 at the age of 72.

Her bereaved husband **Antonio**; loving children **Antonio, Jr.** and **Janice**, **Alan** and **Debbie**; **Anneli** and **Ivan**; **Arlene** and **Raymund**, **Astrid** and **Emil**; **Albert** and **Margie**, **Arnold** and **Luchie**; grandchildren **Cathy**, **Antonette**, **Tony Boy**, **Sabrina**, **Samantha**, **Matthew**, **Lance** and **Allan Marco**; brothers and sisters **Mario** (†), **Sofia**, **Sr. Dolora, S.Sp.S.**, **Mateo, Jr** (†) and **Myrna**; nephews and nieces and other relatives request the pious reader to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at the Holy Trinity Chapel, Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina City.

Interment will be on March 27, 2005,
Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina City
after the 9:00 a.m. Mass.

Our Dearly Beloved

MANUEL SINGSON SONGCO

of Calbiga & Tarangnan, Samar

Peacefully joined our Lord on March 16, 2005 at the age of 86

His bereaved wife **Rita**; his children: **Paulette**, **Roman Neal**, **Gladys**, **Phoebe**, **Suzette**, **Msgr. Albert**, **Felix**, **Sr. Mary Faith OSC**, **Teresita**, **Freddy**, **Bernard**, **Mariza**, **Pempem**, **Maroh**, **Miggie**, **Mabeth**, **Ken**, **Kia**, **Kenken**, **Karan**, **Koyen**, **Peachy**, **Dodong**, **Aneth**, **Caitlin**, **Erin** & **Pen**, request the readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at St. Ignatius Cathedral,
Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

Interment will be at the **Libingan Ng Mga Bayani, Fort Bonifacio**
after the Mass at **St. Ignatius Cathedral, Camp Aguinaldo**
at **8:00 A.M. on March 29, 2005.**

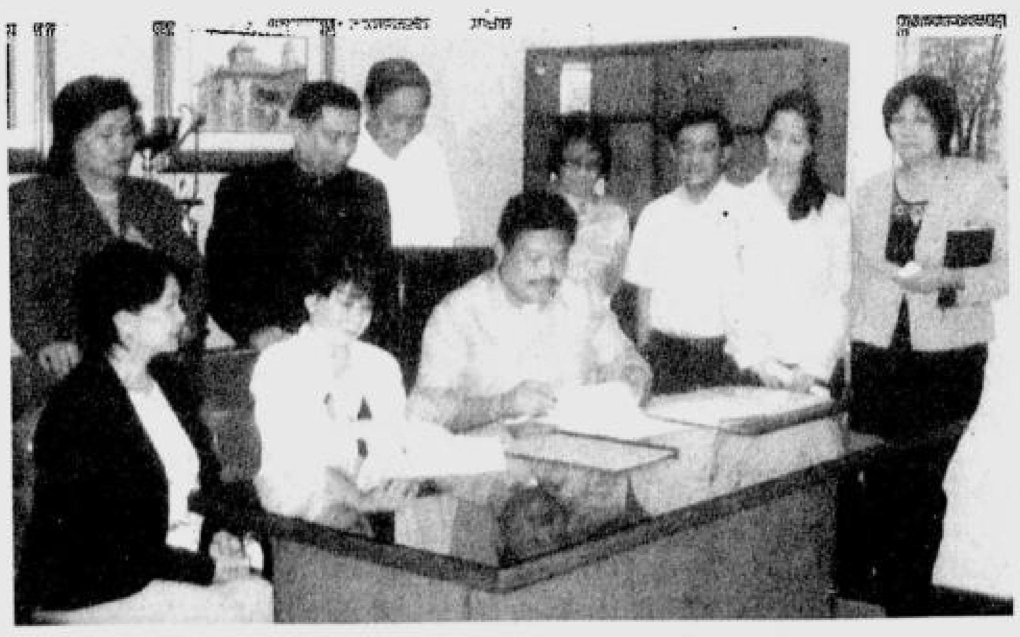
CLASSIFIEDS

NFA joins 'Halad sa Katawhan'

THE NATIONAL Food Authority here participated in the recent "Halad sa Katawhan" or "Alay sa Mamamayan" ni Presidente Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in Sitio Kakha, Barangay Talalak, Negros Oriental by distributing, through the local government unit of Sta. Catalina, 20 bags of rice sold at P16 per kilogram. The NFA also provided 2 bags of rice during a feeding program for children from the neighboring barangays. During the simple ceremonies, governor George Arnaiz acknowledged

NFA's untiring support to the local government's programs. He said the NFA is an important agency which continues to provide extension services to the province.

NFA Negros Oriental provincial manager Raul Chong said the activity was an opportunity for the food agency to provide assistance despite its current financial difficulty. "The program enables the NFA to continue to conduct various social-oriented programs and projects aside from its present mandate of food security and stabilization," Chong said. Sitio Kakha is located 28 kilometers off the town proper situated amidst mountain terrains and rough roads.



STRIKES OUT FLY BY NIGHT SERVICE CONTRACTORS

The Philippine Association of Labor Service Contractors (Palscon), an association of legitimate and highly professional service contractors and in compliance with the labor laws forged ties with DoLE-NCR Director Ricardo Martinez of the Department of Labor and Employment signed a memorandum of agreement in the DoLE office to enforce the law, police its own ranks and report violators to DoLE. The objective of this is to clean up and "strikes out fly by night service contractors" and protect the interest of legitimate ones and their clients. Photo shows (sitting, from left): Linda Dichoson of Almer Manpower Corp and immediate past president of Palscon, Lilia Linda Ang of Skills and Talent Employment Pool Inc signing the MOA in behalf of Palscon, and in behalf of DoLE is Dir. Ricardo Martinez, Regional Director DoLE-NCR. Witnessing the signing (standing from left) Nella Castro of Red Dragon Resources & Trading, Rafael S. Chico of Interlink Manpower Development & General Services Inc, Ruben Siron of City Service Inc, lawyer Agatha Ann L. Daquigan, Officer in Charge and Asst., Regional Director, DoLE-NCR, Nelson C. Hornilla, Officer in Charge-EPD, DOLE-NCR, Rowena Maceren of Globalink Employment Services Inc.

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Retrenchment is working man's Good Friday

By Loree Cruz-Mante
Contributor

FOR A WORKING person, retrenchment may be like dying, since a big part of his life will be forever lost. Loss of control over one's life shatters composure, and the grieving process is often characterized by a roller coaster ride of intense emotions, which tug at the person every which way.

But although employees who are retrenched all suffer the same loss of something familiar, which have become an integral part of their lives, they differ in their capacity to resurrect from the ashes. Some, as in the miracle of Easter morning, emerge victorious over their broken situation and face life more confident of their ability to weather the odds. Others never get to the point of resurrection, and wallow in the mire of their own making for a long, long time.

Seeing the other side

Those who are best able to get over the hump of fear, uncertainty and grief are those who see the other side of what hit them. Those who are able to come to terms with the realities of their situation and view the blessing behind what may seem like a curse get on with their transition faster and less painfully. It is these same people who declare with certainty: "This period of career transition is the most enriching time of my life!"

As in death, there is a resurrection to look forward. Retrenched employees who can acknowledge the shakeup and yet affirm that there is indeed an Easter morning do indeed resurrect!

Choosing to see good

The good fortune of having been retrenched by a caring company may seem to guarantee satisfaction. In truth, however, it does not. There are many sad stories of people walking away with fat retrenchment packages and at the same time harboring thoughts of burning down the office building! To them, the whole experience of job loss is a bad trip, a nightmare from which one awakens in a clammy sweat.

Comparing themselves with others, they imagine their lot to be so much worse than everyone else's. They fail to see that others less privileged than they, with less money and preparation, view them with envy.

The choice to see the good is a choice that is consciously and thoughtfully made. People choose to be happy or sad as an act of will. The retrenched have to make this choice. They can be grateful or ungrateful, disgruntled or at peace. And when this choice is made, it then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: only good comes their way, or only bad. The choice is also a prophecy.

Good side of retrenchment

What's good in being retrenched? There are several possible answers, depending on how retrenched employees choose to view their lot. Let me name a few of the most common ones.

YAaaHH!!!!
RETRENCHED
stephB.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEPH BRAVO

Answer no. 1: I can define who I am. The retrenched employee can say, "This is the time to consider seriously what I would like to do for the rest of my life." For these employees, resurrection is in the luxury of pausing, taking stock, touching base with what they truly value and consider important. "Who am I—really?" is a precious question that people often fear to ask. Breaking the routine of years of working, it takes guts and verve to say, "Stop! Let me step back and look at my life from a different angle!" Not too many have the courage to take such a step, but retrenchment forces the issue. That is, if people choose to see it this way.

Answer no. 2: I can dream anew. One can affirm, "I've given the best years of my life pursuing a star. Now that I've reached it, I've found that it isn't worth keeping." Resurrection is deliverance from the bondage of pursuit for its own sake. Many years are spent chasing after a dream, a promotion, a title. When it is reached, then life becomes dull and boring again, without a center and a focus. Retrenchment can bring back a new spark of achievement, this time more real because one understands what is really worth going after.

Answer no. 3: I can work for balance in my life. The retrenched employee can admit, "I've acknowledged the imbalance in my life and look forward to fixing it." Infants, toddlers, and screaming pre-teeners will not wait until the working parent is done with what he or she has to do. Retrenchment forces people to see the horror in not being there for the kids at a time when they still want their parents around. Too often, many learn too late that childhood is over, and that their children have grown up whether or not they were looking. Resurrection is in the realization that things have to unfold in their proper season. Many retrenched people redefine their season to be now.

More answers

Answer no. 4: I am free to be whatever I want to be. The retrenched employee can proclaim, "I have the freedom to do things I couldn't do before." Resurrection is in having the freedom to move in time and space unfettered by boundaries. This kind of freedom does not mean aimless wandering. It simply means that the daily grind of a harried life is put on hold for a while, long enough for those who have been let go to make sense of what the spinning is all about. When they break free of a schedule that suffocates, then there is more rhyme and reason in how time is spent.

Answer no. 5: I have instant money. With separation pay, the retrenched employee can exclaim, "I would never have saved this kind of money!" For those who are fortunate, resurrection comes in the form of financial breathing space to support the search for a next career. For the even fewer, more fortunate ones, there is enough to pay off loans and mortgages, almost like a jubilee year when debts are paid and written off.

Hope of Easter

The lesson of the Resurrection is that retrenchment cannot be anywhere near what real death is. Although retrenchment may seem larger and darker than anything else that has been experienced before, it still remains a dot in a timeline. And when it comes to pass, people then realize it wasn't worth all the tears, angst, and depression accorded it.

If the Easter miracle can resurrect a whole humankind from despondency to the hope of an eternity, how small your retrenchment woes appear in comparison! Resurrection may seem like a dim possibility at the present time, but if He resurrected to show you and me that death has lost its sting, surely He can show you the way forward! You only need to trust that deliverance is on its way.

(Loree Cruz-Mante is a human resources and organization development practitioner, resident writer of the Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture [ISACC], and consultant with leading outplacement, career transition and management firm, Drake Beam Morin. E-mail your comments to lcmante@yahoo.com.)

'We want to go home for good'

By Tita Datu Puangco

ILLUSTRATION BY ALBERT RODRIGUEZ

MY WIFE and I left the Philippines about 17 years ago to pursue our graduate education in the United States. No, we were not "rich" kids but were fortunate enough to get full scholarships. We had every intention of moving back home and hopefully build a future there. We both graduated, my wife with an MBA and I got my Ph.D. in business.

After working a few years, we started to explore our return to Manila. I interviewed and received job offers from some of the top business schools in Metro Manila. We started to plan our return when the Asian financial crisis hit, then the economy tanked. Despite all of this, we were still planning to move back.

Finally, my late father, someone who worked for next to nothing at the University of the Philippines his entire career, yet loved his country dearly (he had a similar opportunity to stay in the US after he completed his graduate program) told us to stay put. While he would have loved to have us in Manila, he felt that corruption was too entrenched and widespread for Filipinos to succeed. Electing non-qualified officials didn't help either.

Why did I want to move back? The Philippines has and always will be home to me and my wife. I feel a deep affinity to the land and the people. Every time we go home my wife and I talk longingly about the time when we can finally move home for good. However, our future is here as with half of my batch mates at UP and probably half of recent medical school graduates, nurses, etc. are here. Will we ever consider moving back? I doubt it unless we have strong and ethical leadership in place. How can we develop and grow ethical leadership? I wish my *kababayans* well and I will try and make them proud.

AE

Thank you for your letter. I remember years ago, when I had a similar opportunity to study in the United States, I faced the same dilemma: to remain in the US or come home. Like you, my role model was my father who was a professor in a state university, studied on scholarships both in the United States and the United Kingdom. He always encouraged us to remain in the Philippines and try to make a contribution within our sphere of influence. Probably it is naïveté on my father's part. But on a more positive perspective, it was instilling in us a great love for our motherland.

All my brothers and sisters have remained. Even when some of us lived abroad to study or to work, we were like homing pigeons. We always came home after a number of years abroad. I have not regretted the decision to stay in the country. While it is true that many things can disappoint and discourage me, I am able to bounce back and think beyond myself and my family. Perhaps my being a student leader in the late '60s and the important events that happened then had shaped my realities, visions and convictions. Your letter has made me search my heart and reflect. I have no regrets. But I respect and honor your decision to stay abroad.

Advice
FOR THE ANXIOUS PERSON AT WORK

Coming home

But you are right, the longing to come home is strong. Whenever I travel, I meet Filipinos abroad and their common trait is hunger for the homeland. It did not seem to matter that the homeland they experienced has dramatically changed over the years.

Now let us have some thoughts on the earlier issue as to where best to retire. The conversation continues and does not end and cannot end. How true what a Christian sociologist once wrote, "Deep in the heart of every man is the longing for Paradise Lost." We always think that the retirement place has to be the earthly Paradise. But no place or country can be Paradise, unless we live in a loving and caring community, where everyone is ready to sacrifice his own comfort, ideas and cares for the common good. If you find this loving community, whether in the US or in our country, where people look out for one another, then that is the place to retire.

Ethical leaders

How can we develop and grow ethical leadership? Recently, I was reading the story in Business Week on the series of scandals in corporate America, including the indictment of the former World Com CEO for fraud. I realize that while we are more vocal and outspoken about corruption in the government and the private sector in our country, we don't have a monopoly of this malaise.

From my viewpoint, each of us has a responsibility to help develop and grow ethical leadership within our spheres of control and influence. Recently, I conducted a leadership workshop for a leading universal bank with a strong emphasis on ethical conduct and management. We spent three hours talking about ethical policy and behavior including the process how people get enticed, attracted and fall for unethical situations. We talked about how to problem-solve and then role-play how to handle a tempting offer. We also talked candidly about our cultural tendencies that may blind us to ethical considerations such as *pakikisama* or "our difficulty to say no." At the end of the sessions, one participant remarked that the candor of the discussion was refreshing. He also felt the added awareness could enable him to guide his subordinates better in this area.

Checking corruption

Today, a lot of values programs are being used to check corruption. What I would suggest is not to skirt the issue of ethics but go to the core, the jugular of what, where, when and how it happens and what an individual can do if he spots someone doing a questionable, possibly unethical act. But what happens when there is dissonance between what the leader says and what he does? This highlights the responsibility of the leader, because once he or she loses credibility, no ethics or values program is likely to succeed.

I know many groups are concerned and doing their part to check corruption. My former boss in a food conglomerate whom I admire (an engineer by profession, very capable and with high integrity) now does volunteer work to sit through government bidding committees representing the church. In his own way, he is proactively shaping ethical leadership.

When corruption hits the headlines, many people get disappointed. My reaction as a change consultant to companies is exactly the opposite. I say we have hope! The more people become aware of corruption, they talk about it, they joke about it, they feel bad about it, then together as a nation we will find the energy fueled by rightful indignation to go against corruption and transform ourselves. I think we will soon reach the "tipping point" as a bestseller would put it and real change will begin to happen.

Of course, in the journey of our country, our faith in God who guides the destiny of our nation is never lacking. Ultimately, it is the faith in the heart of the Filipino who continues to be optimistic about the future that allows us to plod on and move forward. Many thanks for your letter.

(Ms Puangco is CEO and chair of Ancilla Enterprise Development Consulting. Send feedback through e-mail to advice@ancillaedc.com.ph *or fax to* 892-2902.)

What are the keys to a successful negotiation?

WORKING WOUNDED
Bob Rosner

DEAR WW: I'd like the people in my company to do a better job of negotiating contracts with our customers, but most of the materials I've seen on negotiating are very complex. Can you suggest a simpler guide to negotiations?

Negotiating Our Way

Merle Crossman filed a lawsuit against his fire insurance company claiming they owed him $75,000 for his house that recently burned down. There was only one problem: he filed the lawsuit from the jail where he's serving a sentence for burning down his house. Mr. Crossman maintained that since he pleaded "no contest" to the fire he was still entitled to the insurance payments.

Unfortunately, he's not alone in practicing slash and burn negotiation tactics. It's important to help your people identify the keys to a successful negotiation and how to work with the other party to achieve an outcome that benefits both sides. I've identified the three most important areas in a negotiation along with strategies to and strategies for both sides to get what they need in each of these areas. For more information on negotiaions, check out "The Only Negotiation Guide You'll Ever Need" by Stark & Flaherty (Broadway, 2003).

Time. A huge number of problems in negotiations can be traced back to the two sides operating on different time frames. That's why it's so important to establish a mutually agreeable time frame right from the start. Stark & Flaherty also taught me a very important fact about the time frame of a negotiation. Most concessions and settlements occur in the last 20 percent of the time allowed. So they advise not trying to push too hard, too early for agreement. Agreements need time to develop.

Information. Unfortunately, information is often like a needle in a haystack during a negotiation. You've got to sift through a lot of stuff that doesn't matter to find the one or two key issues that do. You can give this process a boost by asking the other party what information they need and doing what you can to give it to them. And then encourage them to provide you the information that you'll need. Most negotiations use information as a weapon. Set a different tone in your negotiations by turning information into a tool that both sides can get access to.

Power. There are many different types of power in a negotiation—political, historical, positional, financial, cultural, etc. Rarely does one side hold all the power, if for no other reason than it would be to their benefit to work out an agreement with the other party. It's also common for each side to have areas where they have a lot of power and other areas where they are lacking. It's important to learn about your own sources of power and the power that the other side possesses and then to harness it to the benefit of both sides.

Properly leverage these three variables and your team won't burn any bridges in your next negotiation.

Working Wounded/ABCnews.com online ballot question: Which best describes your negotiation strategy at work?

—Hardball, 17.9 percent
—Softball, 55.1 percent
—Curveball, 26.9 percent

(Mr. Rosner, an internationally syndicated columnist, author and speaker, is based in Seattle, Washington, USA. E-mail him at bob@workingwounded.com.)

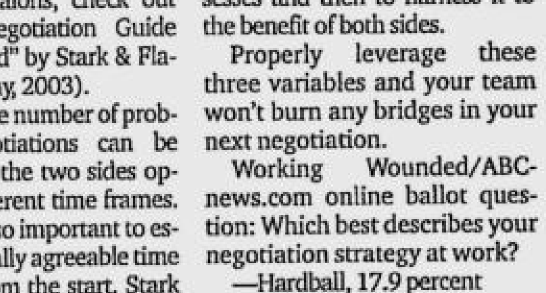


ILLUSTRATION BY DIONISIO BUCCAT

Oil prices dip; Opec to decide on output

MELBOURNE—Oil prices eased on Tuesday but were within reach of the all-time high over $57 as Opec producers weighed raising supply again in a bid to meet robust world demand and stem this year's rally.

A stronger US dollar—which helped cap any further rise in oil prices on Monday—stayed in sight of two-week highs against the euro and the yen ahead of Tuesday's Federal Reserve meeting, which is expected to result in an interest rate rise.

US light crude traded down 22 cents to $57.24 a barrel, just 36 cents below the all-time peak of $57.60 struck last Thursday.

London's Brent crude rose 10 cents to $55.75 a barrel.

Oil prices are up 32 percent since the end of 2004 on worries that strong demand growth, especially in emerging Asian economies and the United States, will strain global production, which is almost at its limits.

The Opec producers' cartel, which makes up more than half of the world's oil exports, is considering raising supplies by another 500,000 barrels per day (bpd), less than a week after it agreed an increase of the same volume with immediate effect.

A second output boost would bring the group's official production ceiling to 28 million bpd, one-third of global demand projected for this year at 84 million bpd.

"If Opec is willing to step up to the plate and supply more oil you would expect that to cap prices, but last week's move didn't do anything at all—prices shot up," said David de Garis, Melbourne-based senior economist at ANZ Investment Bank.

"The market is continuing to push up oil because the technical view is that oil is headed toward $60, so people are trading toward that sort of level."

Saudi Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi said on Monday the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries could decide any time to add the extra barrels.

Opec output is close to a 25-year high and non-Opec producers are pumping at full tilt, leaving little room in the supply chain for any output glitch.

Underlining the market's vulnerability to supply disruptions, US gasoline futures climbed to a record $1.60 a gallon on Monday after two main oil unions in Nigeria called a three-day warning strike from April 11 over employment issues.

Opec-member Nigeria is the eight-largest oil exporter and its crudes are much sought after by refiners for making premium-grade gasoline, especially in the run-up to the peak summer demand season for motor fuels.

Analysts said demand in the world's second-biggest oil consumer was holding firm despite a drop in refined products imports ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday last month.

"(Oil) demand overall remains strong ... China essentially shuts down for two weeks over the new year, which explains the fall in product imports," said Victor Shum at consultants Purvin & Gertz in Singapore.

"Last year's demand growth was phenomenal, and no one really expects that to continue." China's oil demand grew about 16 percent last year but 2005 growth is expected to slow to almost 8 percent, or by 500,000 bpd, to 6.88 million bpd, estimates by the International Energy Agency showed. *Reuters*

SE Asian stocks down

SINGAPORE—The Philippines led losses in Southeast Asian stock markets on Tuesday and Indonesian shares pulled back after setting a new record high, weighed down by losses in banks and consumer-sensitive shares.

By 0430 GMT, Singapore's share index was down 0.28 percent, Malaysian shares were 0.78 percent lower, stocks in the Philippines had fallen 1.70 percent and Thai shares were down 0.36 percent.

Indonesia's share index hit an all-time high of 1,156.959 points, before falling 1.07 percent.

Bank Central Asia fell almost 2 percent.

Foreign investors are cashing in on Indonesia's three-year bull run amid caution over rising interest rates in the United States and high fuel prices, which could dampen domestic consumption that has driven shares in banks and consumer-related firms, said the head of research at a foreign investment bank in Jakarta.

Data from Nomura International showed foreign investors were net sellers of about $2 billion of Indonesian stocks last week and have taken out of the market a net $1.74 billion so far this year. The Indonesian index is still up 14 percent so far this year.

In Manila, holding company SM Investment fell 3.6 percent on its debut after the country's biggest ever initial public offering. Bank of the Philippine Islands fell 5.2 percent and Ayala Land fell 5.8 percent.

Dealers in Manila said the selling was mainly from retail investors reluctant to hold positions ahead of the Easter holidays starting Thursday.

In Singapore, Singapore Telecommunications fell about one percent after a local newspaper reported the company's Australian subsidiary Optus was considering plans to cut costs and staff in the face of slowing growth and competition.

Oil-rig builder Keppel Corp. fell 2.7 percent, a day after it rose 3.7 percent on hopes rising oil prices would boost its business.

In Malaysia, top lender and index-heavyweight Malayan Banking Bhd. fell 2.6 percent after a newspaper reported it was eyeing a takeover of financial consultancy BinaFikir Sdn Bhd.

The Thai market was weighed down after the government announced a sharp rise in domestic diesel prices, heightening concerns over economic growth and domestic demand. *Reuters*

US Fed seen pushing rates up anew

WASHINGTON—Federal Reserve policy-makers, wanting to prevent a broader outbreak of inflation as oil prices surge, are likely to keep pushing short-term interest rates higher.

The Fed is poised to boost its key federal funds rate by one-quarter percentage point to 2.75 percent Tuesday. That would mark the seventh increase of that size since June 2004.

While economists consider Tuesday's expected increase a largely foregone conclusion, there's intense interest—and mixed opinions—on what signals, if any, Fed policy-makers may offer about the future course of rates.

The Fed, after each meeting, issues a brief statement that usually provides an explanation of a given interest rate decision as well as some thoughts on the economy. Fed watchers examine the statement for hints about future monetary policy.

"There is a lot more suspense in the tone of the statement. We are all wondering what the Fed is and isn't seeing in the economy and how that will affect interest rate policy through the end of the year," said Carl Tannenbaum, chief economist at LaSalle Bank.

Especially of interest to economists is whether the Fed will stick with its current stance that future rate increases will be gradual.

Since May 2004, the Fed's statements have said rates can rise "at a pace that is likely to be measured." Measured has come to be viewed as quarter-point bump ups.

Some economists think that language will be kept—for now, anyway. A few believe it could be dropped at Tuesday's meeting.

If the "measured" phrase were abandoned altogether, it could mean future interest rate increases might be less predictable than they have been, economists said.

To be sure, how economic activity and inflation unfold in the months ahead will figure prominently into whether the Fed speeds up or slows down its rate-raising campaign, analysts said.

Some economists predict the Fed will follow Tuesday's expected rate increase with quarter-point boosts at both the May and June meetings, which would leave the funds rate at 3.25 percent.

Then the Fed would pause and take a wait-and-see attitude toward any further moves, some economists said.

Others, however, believe the Fed will keep lifting the funds rate through much of this year, pushing the rate up to around 4 percent.

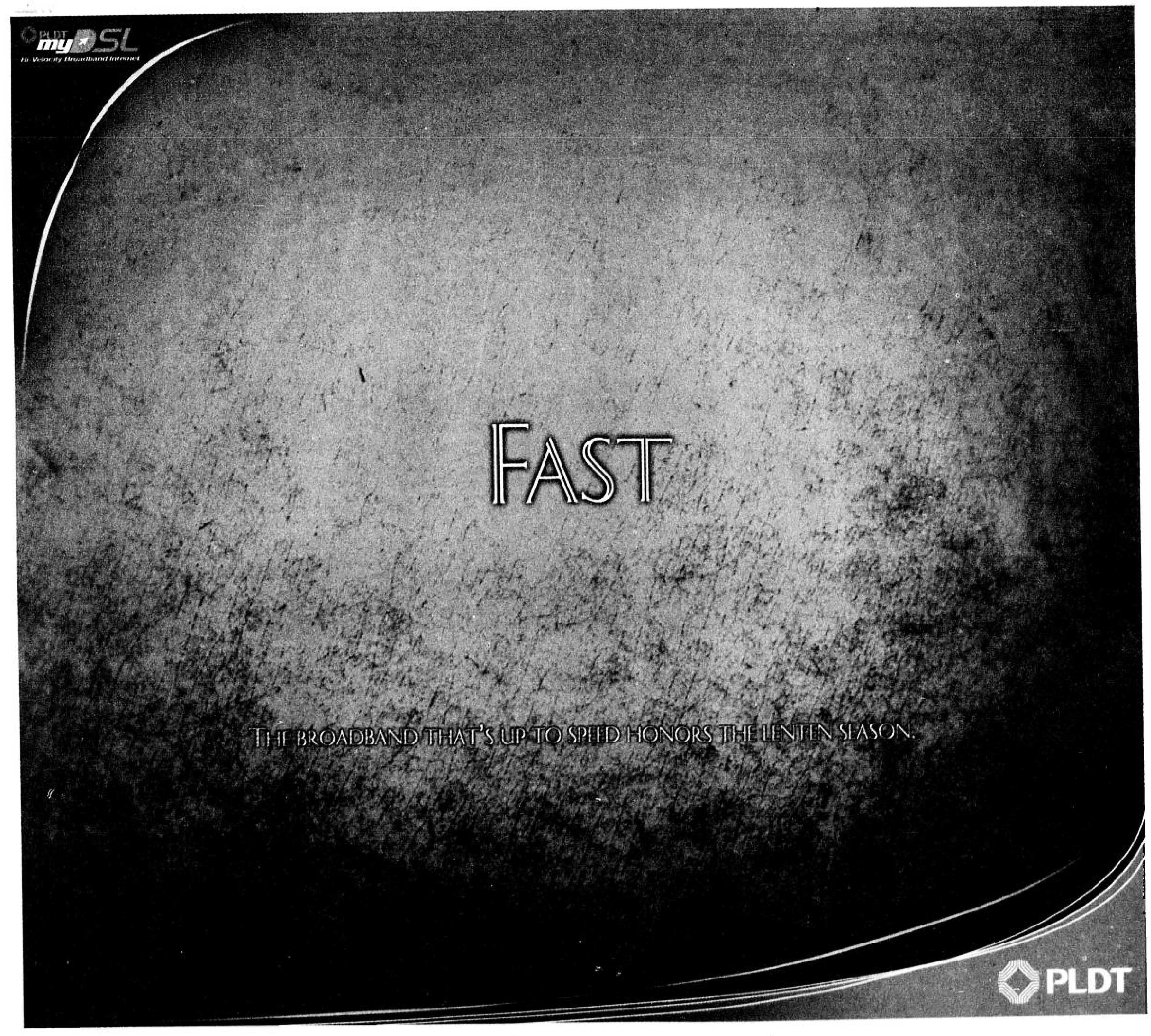
The funds rate is the interest banks charge each other on overnight loans and is the Fed's main tool for influencing the economy.

The funds rate moves in lockstep with commercial banks' prime lending rate, which is used for many short-term consumer and business loans.

The prime rate, now at 5.50 percent, would climb to 5.75 percent if the Fed pushes the funds rate up by one-quarter point Tuesday.

The Fed is lifting rates as energy prices are surging again. Oil prices, which set a new record high last week, briefly skyrocketed above $57 a barrel in trading Monday. That's helping to propel gasoline prices sharply higher.

Economists said the Fed will keep a close eye on whether high energy prices damp consumer spending, the lifeblood of the economy. *AP*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Good Samaritans on the road

By Tessa R. Salazar

FOR THE TRAVEL-HUNGRY urbanites, all roads this Holy Week lead not to Golgotha, but to vacation paradise. Still, as frenzied motorists rush to their summer destinations, the roads most traveled are still fraught with danger. Take it from a radio transmission from Mark Anthony Lopez, Petron training director.

"We've encountered a three-vehicle collision and another turning turtle," his radio hisses. Later on, some more morbid news over the shortwave frequency: "We have to look for the decapitated arm of a passenger...We found the arm and we have to rush to the hospital to give it to the owner."

Lakbay Alalay

Mark isn't just an ordinary observer reporting roadside accidents. He and a hundred other Petron employees have partnered with Red Cross for the four-day stretch this Holy Week considered the peak travel time for millions of Filipinos this year to provide emergency roadside assistance to whoever needs it.

Its name: Lakbay Alalay. Providing anything from simple troubleshooting services to mineral water to dehydrated motorists and their passengers, to first-aid and emergency services for serious accidents. Its ambulances are on standby in base camps along the North and South tollways (PNCC and MNTC) and Star Tollway in Batangas. Medical teams are on the ready.

The Petron Lakbay Alalay team is expecting another "harvest" of customers this year. In 2004, the program serviced up to 2,000 vehicles in distress during the four-day stretch. Still, this number pales in comparison to the earlier editions of the 19-year-old Lakbay Alalay program, when Petron serviced more than 6,000 in the same four-day stretch.

Decline

The decline in the number of trouble vehicles can be attributed to the fact that newer cars roam the highways in increasing numbers, reducing the risk of mechanical problems. Still, some problems cannot be avoided, and so the usual flat tires crop up, with some drivers forgetting to bring along spare tires and tools. For older model cars, radiator systems and fan belts may malfunction, and engines may overheat.

Some of these so-called "inevitable" car problems could be avoided, Petron Lakbay Alalay technicians assert. It's just a matter of taking time out to inspect the car and nipping the problem in the bud. Last week, selected Petron service stations conducted free pretrip inspections just to improve the odds in favor of the motorist.

Carmakers

Carmakers are also doing their share to make the long drives spent behind the wheel and not under the hood.

- **Ford.** It has started its Ford-On-the-Road Response Crew and Equipment (FORCE) program today up to Sunday at the North and South Luzon Expressways.

Motorists can avail themselves of the FORCE in Ford Pampanga in San Fernando, Camp John Hay in Baguio and in Shell gas stations in Tagaytay, Tarlac and Batangas from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Motorists' various immediate needs will be attended to, and maintenance parts and various tools will be made available. FORCE services will also be provided to non-Ford vehicles. "Safety Cards" will be issued to those visiting FORCE sites.

- **Toyota.** The Toyota Summer on the Road Service Campaign, on the other hand, will be on standby in selected points in northern and southern Luzon to assist motorists in their Toyotas in emergency situations starting tomorrow until Sunday.

TSOS serves as an off-base activity that offers the motoring public free labor for emergency roadside services during the Holy Week (for TSOS mobile stations, please read "Full Tank").

Service advisers and various technicians (including air-con and battery technicians) will be available onsite to provide assistance.

- **Mazda.** Regardless of the vehicle brand, Mazda service teams from Mazda Greenhills and Mazda Alabang will provide free emergency roadside assistance at key satellite areas. Mazda teams will be stationed at the Red Arch Furniture Center, Barangay Nancayasan, Urdaneta City, Pangasinan in northern Luzon and at the Garden Hills Subdivision, Barangay Sikat, Alfonso, Cavite for travelers heading South.

Mazda is also providing motorists emergency hotlines: 0917-5311102 for the North Luzon station of Mazda Greenhills and 0920-9078148 for the South Luzon station of Mazda Alabang.

- **Honda.** For Honda and non-Honda motorists, Honda Emergency Assistance Team started yesterday and will end on Sunday. HEAT stations will be manned by Honda technicians who will offer emergency assistance, travel advisory, free 18-point checkup and regular preventive maintenance checkup (except 80Tkm).

There will be light to medium repair, Honda super saver service, renewal service system (hydrophilic), sales inquiry and discounts on Honda parts and accessories and lubes.

Honda destinations will be at Baguio City (Interior Decors Center), Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija (Total station), Tuguegarao City, Cagayan (S&J Marketing), Olongapo City (Halfmoon Beach Resort), Tagaytay City (Total staion), Legaspi City, Albay (Vista Al Mayon) and Sto Tomas, Batangas.

Other good samaritans

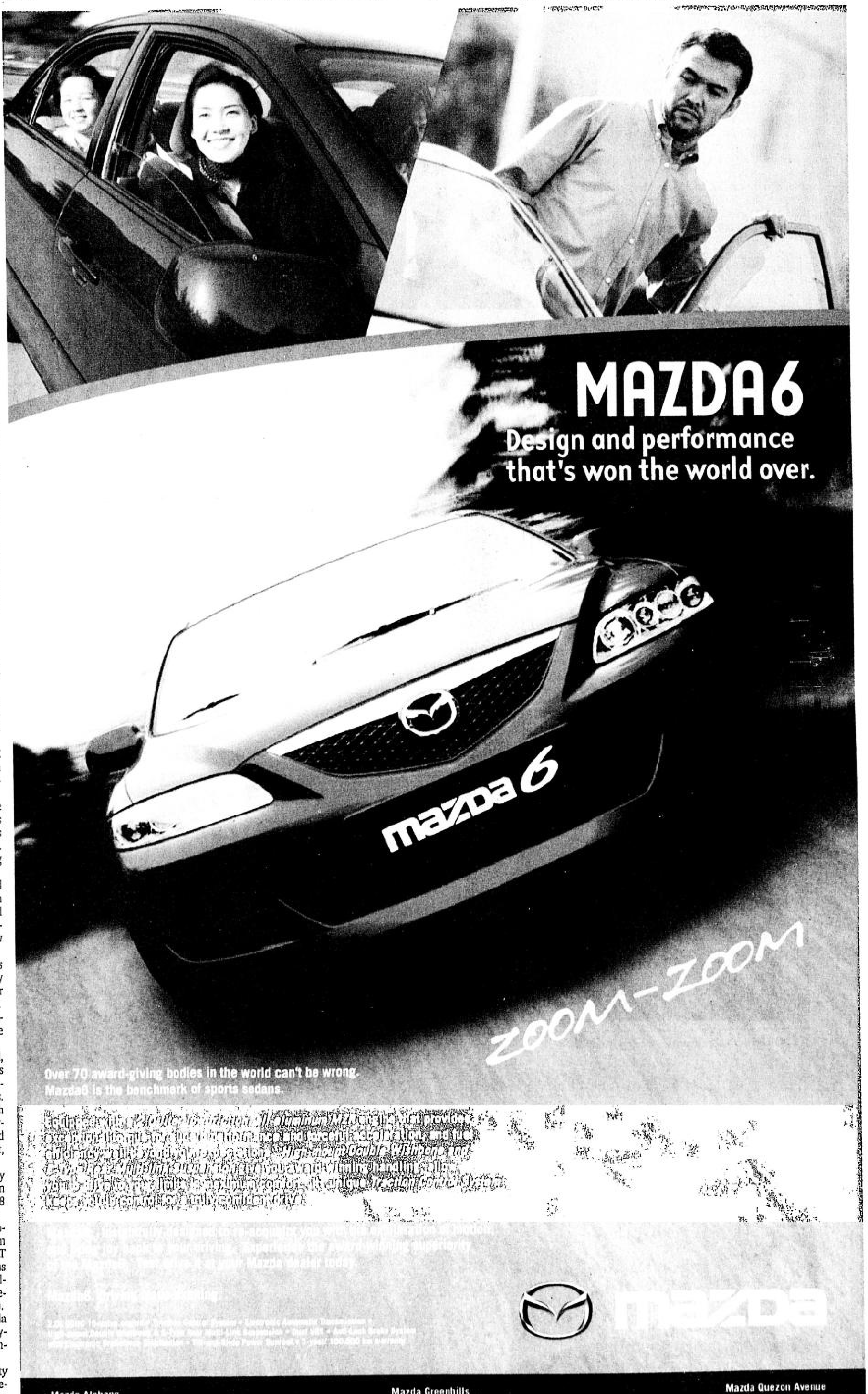
- **Westgate Center.** Motorists heading to the south can check out the 9.2-hectare Westgate Center Auto Zone in Filinvest Alabang. It offers free diagnoses, 10-percent discounts on parts and 15-percent discounts on labor from Rite-serve Diesel Center. There's free gas for every purchase of a Chevrolet Venture or Optra 1.8LT, with special financing deals and other discount and freebie packages.
- **Total.** Its gas stations offer basic gasoline engine change oils or basic diesel engine change oil plus free preventive maintenance checkup. Its customers can have free Internet access while waiting for their vehicles being serviced.

Your own inspections

Even without the assistance of service stations and car manufacturers, vehicle owners would do well to conduct their own pretrip inspections before embarking on a long trip.

One easy-to-remember acronym could spell the difference. It's called BLOWBAGA, for B-attery, L-ight, O-il, W-ater, B-rake, A-ir or tire, G-as and A-ccessories.

Other car-care tips include checking the tire rod, and cleaning and properly positioning rearview mirrors [you should be able to see at least 200 feet behind you with the mirrors, and you should see oncoming vehicles on the side, and not just at the rear of your vehicle].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Getting tanned, Z4 style

Text and photos by Charles E. Buban

I AM one of those who avoid getting sunburned. As much as possible, I stay out of the sun between the hours of 10 a.m and 2 p.m. (when the sun's rays are most damaging).

But last week, I threw all caution to the wind when fellow motoring scribe Lester Dizon suggested we fold down our car's retractable roof and I agreed to welcome the late morning sun without a second thought.

Who cares about getting sunburned or worry about inhaling exhaust fumes—this is one of those rare moments when I could fully experience the ride aboard BMW's latest pleasuremobile, the undulating Z4 roadster convertible.

Invited

Two weeks ago, we were invited by BMW Philippines to experience the Z4.

Bringing in five of these roadsters each worth P3.7 million for the event, we were promised an exhilarating riding experience on our way to—and back from—a resort in Batangas.

So off we drove to Bamboo Beach in Nasugbu, Batangas. The weather was warm that Thursday morning and the traffic going to the coastal town (via the South Luzon Expressway and Tagaytay City) was quite tolerable.

After just 30 minutes of weaving through C5 and SLEX traffic (from our starting point at The Fort), we knew it would be difficult to write our experience without using the word "smooth" several times.

And we both agreed the Z4 is one ultimate smooth sports car.

Z3 replacement

The Z4, which replaced the Z3, is more than just a "successor replacing a predecessor."

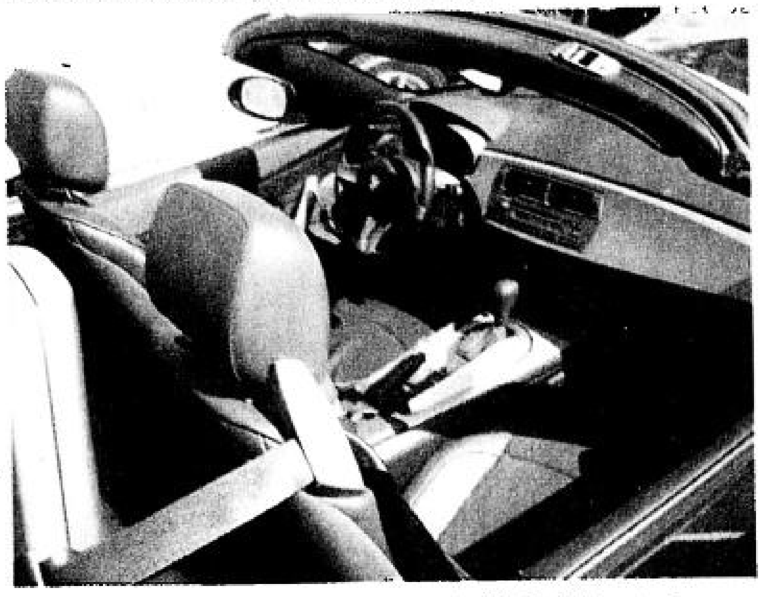
One will notice the Z4's curves and bulges, with its "skin" looking like a tight outfit over a muscular body.

Apart from a much bolder design, the Z4 is also built on a longer wheelbase (36 mm more), and is much wider (41 mm more) and longer (66 mm more) than its predecessor.

The Z4 is the first open-air BMW to feature a folding roof with a special folding mechanism. When retracted, the roof takes up very little space and allows the front most part of the roof to extend like a cover over the soft top, merging flush with the body of the car.

A great deal of consideration has also gone into the roadster aerodynamics when driving with the roof down (that ensures less wind and wind noise for the driver and occupant).

THE PERCEPTION of driving a Z4 is one of power, since one looks out over a long hood, like an engineer in a locomotive.



INTERIOR design is carefully harmonized with the bold exterior design.

With all these highlights, the Z4 takes BMW and the roadster segment to another level, giving the likes of Porsche Boxster and the Mercedes-Benz SLK, their main rivals, some tough competition.

Ample power

No doubt, the Z4 packs ample power. The 2.5i model (with an inline 6-cylinder gas engine configuration) that we drove generates 141 kW (that's 192 horses) of power which, in line with a relatively light 1,590 kg weight, a five-speed automatic transmission with Steptronic manual mode, accelerates from zero to 100 kph in 7.5 seconds.

Also, the Z4's high performance sport suspension and steering plus a much-reinforced chassis and 17-inch wheels definitely gives the driver a more direct feel of the road.

The real perk on the Z4 is the Sport button next to the gear selector. This quickens the throttle, steering and shifting of the automatic transmission, much like a hit of caffeine for a car that's already wide awake.

Modern roadster

Getting into the Z4, one realizes right away that this two seater is a truly modern roadster.

One will appreciate sitting down very low and far to the rear, which ensures direct perception of all vehicle movements, particularly in tight bends.

Letting Dizon do a number of "expert" maneuvers, sharp curves while riding the Z4 suddenly seemed quite straight, the car barely straining to resist centrifugal force.

At one point, we were weaving though traffic with a slow bus in the lane in front of us and another car closing fast in the passing lane. In one graceful split-second move, Dizon quickly downshifted, switched lanes, and roared ahead of the bus before the car behind us had any need to adjust to our presence.

Awesome!

Munich, we have liftoff: the New 3 Series

(First of two parts)

CATCH MY DRIFT

Andre Palma

CARS these days are no longer the straightforward engine, chassis and suspension combinations of yesteryear. Though the interplay of these three fundamental systems make up the essential basics of a good working automobile, exponential advances in technology and design innovation have, in my most humble opinion, sealed the fate of the good "simple car."

The new BMW 3 Series (E90 chassis designation) makes a statement of technological superiority in the here and now; and at the same time, is clearly pointed in the direction of the future. It has the undeniably difficult task of having to be the right car for a large section of the BMW buying public.

Doing its job well

In a production year where worldwide sales have peaked slightly over the 1,000,000 unit mark, the fact that the 3 Series makes up for almost half of all sales indicates that the product is doing its job rather well. From office executives to weekend road warriors, many saw the last model, the E46, as relevant to their needs. My most burning question is: will the new E90 be up to the task and is it possible to be better than its obviously successful predecessor?

The answer comes in small but very relevant details. The opportunity to speak personally with the design and engineering team revealed the anecdotes that spurred innovation and ultimately the improvement of an already effective automobile.

Forceful design statement

A perusal of the front fascia will show that the front tires actually peep out from behind the sculpture of the front air dam. The team thought that this would make a potent and forceful design statement, accentuating the substantial 17-inch tire and wheel combination that is worn by the new 3. The wind tunnel guys would not have any of it, as it is obviously an aerodynamically inefficient setup that would cost the vehicle's overall airflow a lot of efficiency.

Enter the men and women of functional integration team (the troubleshooters, if you will), and their bespoke driving lamps. By angling the two small lamps outward and integrating these with the front lip spoiler and air dam, the turbulence in that front section is effectively buffeted around the massive 225/45x17 tires.

EQUALLY capable in the bright lights of the big city—and in the vast open country

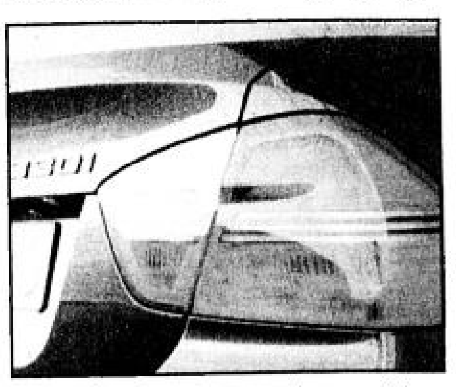
A LOOKER with aerodynamic driving lamps. Sweet.

NEXT week: Does good design equal good dynamics?

Beyond mere esthetics

The multiplanar design of the rear signal and brake lights also serves a purpose beyond mere esthetics. The head of functional integration, Dr. Peter Hermann, described it in a very matter-of-fact manner. During winter, in the hinterlands of Scandinavia there are three dangerous constants: the snow, the mud and massive Russian cargo trucks plowing through the highways.

Very often, in the harsh winter conditions, snow and mud will obscure and sometimes completely cover the rear brake lights of cars making them almost invisible to fast onrushing traffic. Accidents occur, and in the vast frozen emptiness of reindeer country, medical help is often very far away, weather permitting. The polygonal design of the rear lights use the airflow of the rear spoiler and side panels to keep a small but visible section of the lights clear of mud and snow even through the toughest sub-Artic weather conditions.



E90 TAILLIGHTS: All weather capable, complete with countermeasures for Russian trucks

Aural tour

Dr. Hermann also took me on an aural tour of 30 years of the 3 Series' front doors. In a display hall of Valencia's City of Arts and Sciences, BMW provided pristine samples of each 3 Series model from the wedge-shaped 1975 model to the new amorphous 2005 E90 in 330i trim. The good doctor patiently accompanied me, opening and closing the doors of each of the five different chassis models, asking my impressions of each sound made by the different car's doors. "Progressively solid," was my answer, "but the E90 is different."

The sound can best be described as also solid, yet relatively modest, almost faint. BMW started with a market acceptable sound, which was replicated by the sound engineers and finally executed by manufacturing. For all intents and purposes, the new E90 door is a custom-designed percussion instrument.

Now that we have an idea of the extent by which BMW has pushed the engineering envelope of the car, the motoring public will ask, "Well, how does it drive and, more importantly, is it any good?"

PHILIPPINES, say hello to the new BMW 3 Series. Are we ready?

Toyota's IMV adventure in Australia

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

HAVING overtaken Ford Motor Co. as the world's second largest car manufacturer, Toyota Motor Corp. is now aggressively pursuing a 15 percent global market share target. Since its IMV (Innovative International Multipurpose Vehicle) project plays a role in its "Global 15" plan to displace General Motors as the world's biggest automaker, Toyota invited some 50 motoring journalists two weeks ago from Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines to Australia for the Toyota Great Multipurpose Vehicle Adventure.

The objective of the MPV Adventure in Sydney and the Gold Coast was to familiarize us with the IMV project and give us the chance to drive off-road and on-road in Darlington Park near Brisbane the three IMV MPVs (Innova minivan, Hilux pickup and Fortuner sport utility vehicle) and other Toyota MPVs from the United States, Japan and Australia. Although an 80 km/hr speed limit and a no overtaking rule were imposed on the on-road drivers, we still enjoyed the test-driving program because three kinds of off-road courses (easy, medium and extreme) were open for those at the wheel of 4x4 vehicles.

Test-drive day

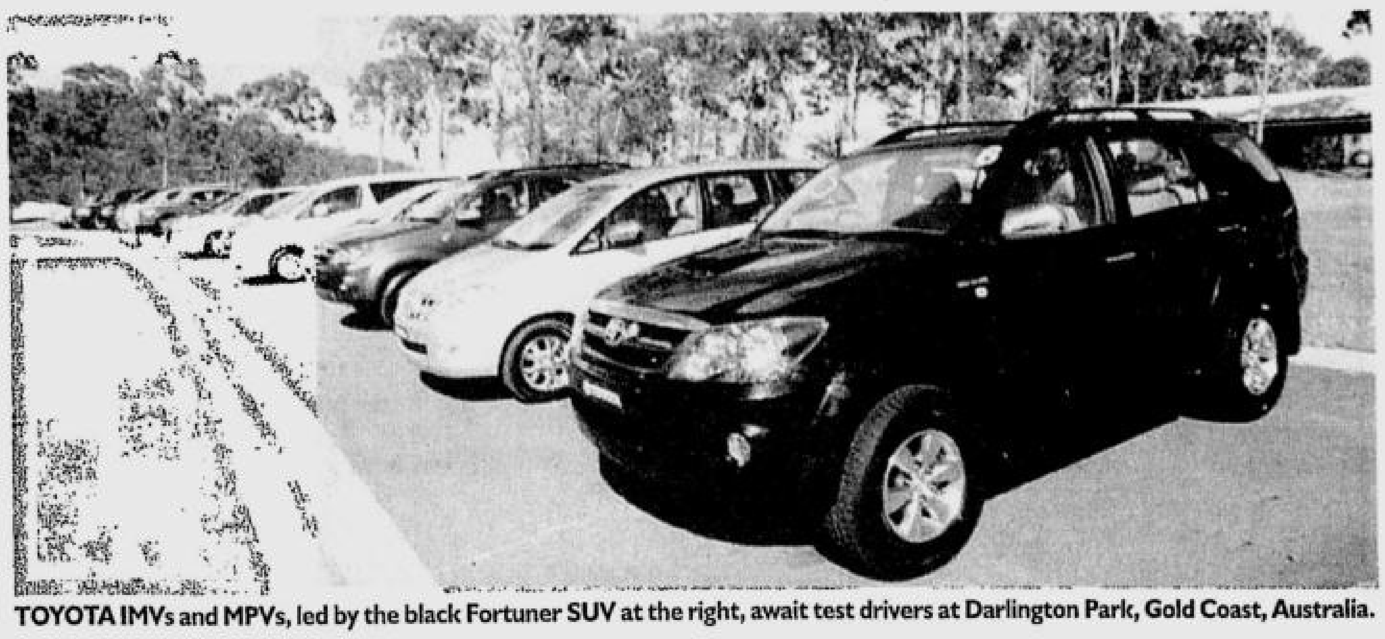
Whoever thought of including one whole day of on-road and off-road test drives in our IMV educational tour is a marketing genius. Where and when else could you test the mettle of not only the IMV series but also the Sequoia, Tacoma (voted 2005 Truck of the Year by Motor Trend), Tundra, Prado, Land Cruiser 100, Land Cruiser 78 Troop Carrier, Sienna, Kluger (known as the Hilander SUV in the United States) and Alphard hybrid minivan?

I suspect the successful four-day Australian event was conceptualized by Vince Socco, the Singapore-based general manager of Toyota Motor Asia Pacific's Marketing Services Department who used to be the top marketing honcho of Toyota Motor Philippines. As Mr. Socco said in his welcome remarks, Australia, the great continent of adventure, is the perfect venue for experiencing the excitement of driving all these new MPVs.

Same QDR

Driving the IMVs on the same courses and on the same day as the MPVs sold in North America, Australia and Japan convinced us that the IMVs designed and produced by Toyota for emerging markets like the Philippines have the same level of Toyota QDR (quality, durability and reliability) as those made for advanced countries. The Hilux 4x4 double cab, which was launched in Manila last December, and the Fortuner 4x4 SUV, which will arrive in Manila this May or June as the final number in the IMV series, tackled the tough off-road courses just as capably as the made-for-the-USA Tundra and Land Cruisers. The Hilux, by the way, will soon be sold in Europe, which goes to show that IMVs do meet First World standards.

Toyota included MPVs from other countries in the test drives for another reason: to show how it drew from its rich MPV experience around the world—Toyota MPVs are sold on every continent except Antartica—to develop the IMVs. While Toyota incorporated the best characteristics of its MPVs such as sturdiness, drivability on rough roads and loading capacity, importance was also given to car-like riding comfort, safety features, fuel economy, handling and attractive design. Plus the highest "Made by Toyota" quality at an affordable price no matter where the IMV is produced or sold.



TOYOTA IMVs and MPVs, led by the black Fortuner SUV at the right, await test drivers at Darlington Park, Gold Coast, Australia.

Global

The IMV project represents a paradigm shift in Toyota's way of thinking since it is being implemented almost entirely outside Japan, including purchasing, manufacturing and logistics. Toyota hopes that the IMV project will build a more efficient production and supply system on a global scale as it orchestrates the procurement of thousands of parts from over 600 firms worldwide. The planning/development of the IMVs was also global since Toyota met with and listened to dealers and customers in Asia, Africa and South America and then discussed the issues among members of the design and engineering teams.

The result was the development of five different IMV models: three variants—standard cab, double cab and extra cab—of the Hilux (Vigo in Thailand) pickup; the Fortuner SUV; and the Innova (Kijang Innova in Indonesia) minivan. The IMVs are not mere derivatives of original prototypes in Japan or of existing Toyota MPVs, but all-new vehicles from the ground up with a newly designed frame and suspension package and new high-performance engines: the TR-FE 2.0-liter, 16-valve DOHC gasoline engine with VVT-i, and the KD-FTV 3.0 liter intercooler turbo second generation common rail diesel engine.

4 bases

Toyota Motors Thailand will produce diesel engines and the Hilux and Fortuner while gasoline engines and the Innova will be made in Indonesia and manual transmissions in the Philippines and India. This year, IMVs are scheduled to roll out in Argentina and South Africa.

The four main IMV production and export bases (Thailand, Indonesia, Argentina and South America) will supply some 500,000 IMV units to Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania, Latin America and the Middle East by 2006. Small, compared to the 2.06 million cars and trucks the Toyota Group sold in the United States in 2004, but it will still bring Toyota one step closer to achieving its "Global 15" goal.

* * *

TODAY'S BUMPER STICKER: A cynic is a man who, when he smells flowers, looks around for a coffin. —**H.L. Mencken**

* * *

E-mail comments to asevilla@inquirer.com.ph.

Let's be cool

FULL TANK

Al Mendoza

I AM sure many from Metro Manila have left already for the province, if not yesterday (Tuesday), on Monday. I know several who had gone much earlier: Last Sunday, March 20.

"To beat the traffic hassles," was their chorus reply when asked why the early exodus to the countryside.

Many also have flown, either to Visayas or Mindanao, or even to either Legaspi or Laoag, Masbate, Puerto Princesa, Baguio, Calapan or Boac. Always, there's a Metro Manila resident whose roots are somewhere out of the Big City.

The trip could also either be to nearby Bulacan or Laguna, Rizal or Cavite. Always, to Metro-Manila-based country person, the habit is to escape the metropolis each time the opportunity presents itself.

And the Holy Week is no exception.

* * *

Our motorists from the metropolis can never avoid either the Southern Luzon Expressway (SLEX) or the Northern Luzon Expressway (NLEX) in their trip back to their roots, or simply to an out-of-town destination. As expected, both major arteries going up North and down South are ready to cope with the situation, as they've always been.

But then, whether we like or not, the NLEX, more than the SLEX, will be the cynosure of all eyes this time.

That is so because the NLEX will have its first acid test since its opening only a few weeks back.

With the uproar over what our allergic-to-change motorists insist is a high toll at NLEX—it has not quite totally died down yet—it is best that a 24-hour watch at this expressway be instituted by officials of the Manila North Tollways Corp. from today (Wednesday, March 23) up to Monday (March 28).

Hot heads will be in abundance and I will highly recommend that diplomatic, smiling and calm personnel be deployed to ease what might escalate from a mere pocket tension to a full-blown chaos along the 84-km road wonder. Just imagine the monumental hassle that could happen when just one altercation between an MNTC official and a motorist erupts. Again, lest we forget, there'd be thousands of motorists using the NLEX.

Anarchy would be too tame an adjective once tempers erupt.

Anyway, the trick is to be patient, cool and level-headed at all times, especially on the part of MNTC personnel.

To my fellow motorists, let's do our own share. Patience, a keen sense of what is reasonable, must be observed at all times.

Believe you me: We can all reach our destination safely and comfortably if we exercise caution at all times.

* * *

As usual, we have road assistance projects all over during this time of the year. Worth mentioning are Volvo and Toyota, whose services ensure an almost trouble-free trip to the province for everybody.

For Volvo assistance, call Baguio at 0927-2225619 and 0915-5596293; Makati at 0919-3193545 and 0917-8238746. Also at 8942414 or 8942417. Other phone numbers ready to respond are 893-6621 to 22 (Makati showroom) and 637-0414 to 15 (Ortigas showroom).

Volvo also offers services on oil change, repair, brake check, tune-up and free engine diagnostics from March 22 to 26.

* * *

The service people of Toyota Motor Philippines (TMP) Corp. will also be on the road as well to ensure a safe and smooth travel for us. Now on its 14th year of service, TMP will once again conduct the Toyota Summer on the Road Service Campaign (TSOS).

From March 24 to 27, Toyota will be on standby in various Northern and Southern Luzon locations ready to assist Toyota motorists in emergency situations.

The TSOS is an annual service activity for the summer holidays conducted by selected Toyota dealers in Northern and Southern Luzon. For the past 14 years, the TSOS served as an off-base activity that offers free labor charge for emergency roadside service for the motoring public in various vacation sites during the Holy Week.

The Toyota Service Mobile stations include Toyota Baguio in Baguio City (Caltex station), Toyota Shaw-Ortigas in La Union (Caltex station), Toyota Commonwealth in Capas, Tarlac Caltex station, Toyota San Fernando along San Fernando Olongapo-Gapan Road, and Toyota Balintawak in Guagua Olongapo-Gapan Road Caltex station in Northern Luzon.

The Southern Luzon teams are composed of Toyota Quezon Avenue in Tagaytay City junction, Toyota Makati in Calamba, Laguna Barangay Halang Caltex station, Toyota Batangas in San Pablo, Laguna Caltex station. Service advisers, technicians, air-con technicians and battery technicians will be available on site to provide assistance.

I can only applaud the guys and dolls doing work on days when virtually the entire nation is resting.

* * *

NLEX NOTES: I suggest that both the entry and exit points of motorists using the EC Tag must be placed at the center. Placing them at the outermost left is an inconvenience, which is an irony. Aren't EC Tag users supposed to be privileged, and are thus treated with special attention over and above the nonusers of the EC Tag? Just a thought, fellas.

And, yes, Happy Easter!

* * *

QUOTE ME: Make sure you carry with you a jack and a wheel nut wrench on your Holy Week road trip. You forget everything but not said tools.

X-Trail tops compact SUV voting of C! Magazine, Coty

THERE seems to be no stopping the Nissan X-Trail from winning more accolades. After topping the compact SUV charts for six months in 2004 and finishing a strong second in total 2004 sales for that segment, the mighty X-Trail won the votes of motoring journalists as the best compact SUV in town.

C! Magazine recently voted the X-Trail as the Best Compact SUV, while the Car Awards Group Inc. (Cagi) in its inaugural Car of the Year (Coty) also named the X-Trail Best Light SUV. In C! Magazine and Cagi's evaluation, the X-Trail also went up against the compact SUVs of luxury brands.

"C! Magazine and Cagi's respective evaluations and voting for the most outstanding vehicles for each segment were very credible. And what could be more convincing than the X-Trail's coming out as the most outstanding compact or light SUV in both evaluations," explained Chock Camacho, sales planning manager at Nissan Motor Philippines Inc. (NMPI).

Hottest seller

The X-Trail is at present NMPI's hottest seller. Last year, it accounted for 52 percent or 2,976 units of the 5,727 velucles sold by NMPI through its dealers in 2004.

Data from the Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers in the Philippines Inc. (Campi) showed the X-Trail topped the compact SUV charts in June and from August to December last year, allowing it to grab a strong second spot to the Honda CR-V, which had sales of 3,158 units in 2004.

Greatest accolades

The greatest accolades the X-Trail has received so far are from its buyers, who were instrumental in spreading word of mouth about its excellent attributes.

"The strong sales of the X-Trail last year proved it already gained its loyal followers, who in turn spread word of mouth about it. What else can we say considering our advertising on the X-Trail was substantially low compared to competitors. That says a lot about the X-Trail," Camacho said.

The X-Trail abounds with many excellent qualities, ranging from its technologically advanced drivetrain to its class-leading comfort.

The X-Trail is equipped with the "All-Mode Four-Wheel-Drive" system, where in Auto Mode, the "no-slip on start-ups" feature gives the X-Trail power on all four wheels when the accelerator pedal is depressed. The X-Trail's computer system does the disengaging of 4x4 when it is not needed.

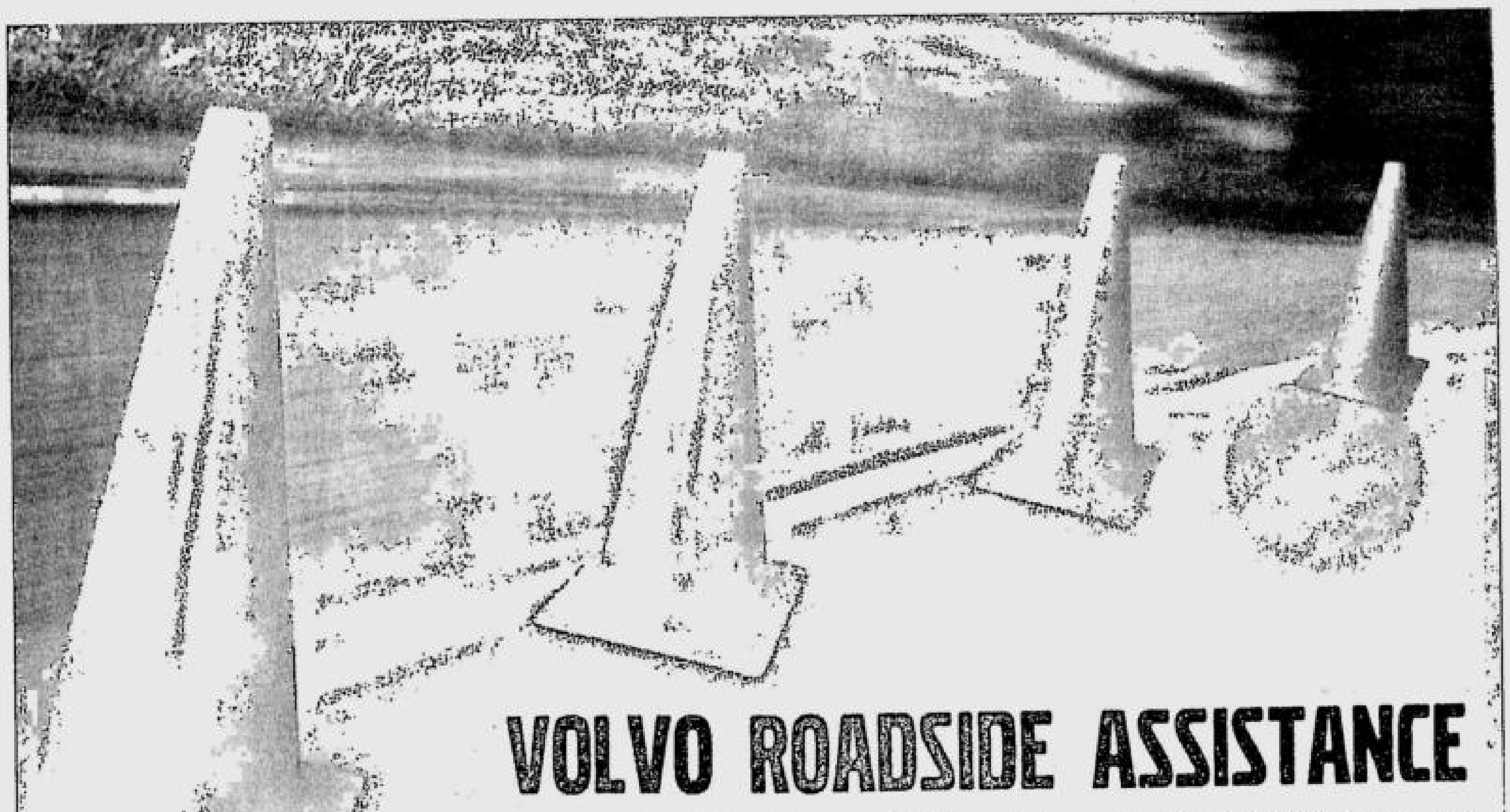
With this feature, the X-Trail can excel offroad without losing traction since the four wheels operate each time the accelerator is depressed.

Engines

The X-Trail is powered by QR-series 2.5- and 2.0-liter engines, that deliver 180PS and 150PS, respectively. Equipped with CVTC or Continuous Variable Timing Control, the X-Trail's engines are known for their ample torque, responsiveness and smoothness.

The comfortable ride comes from its aluminum front transverse links along with the trapezoidal rear struts and long stroking shock absorbers, which work in unison to stabilize ride and smoothen the bumps.

"In the final analysis, the X-Trail's topping the evaluation and voting of C! Magazine and Cagi proves that it was destined to become a best seller in the Philippine market," Camacho said.



VOLVO ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

This season, VOLVO offers roadside assistance to its loyal following. On March 22-26, we guarantee smooth driving and security behind the wheel that you so rightly deserve. The VOLVO team will be on standby at Camp John Hay in Baguio City (0927-2225619/0915-5596293) and in our Makati showroom (894-2417/894-2414/0919-3193545/0917-8238746) - ready, willing and very much able to respond to any car trouble you might meet on the road.

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MITSUBISHI MOTORS

Tire care tips

HERE are some tire care tips provided by Michelin, the world's leader in tires.

- **Set tires to the right pressure**—Drivers should follow the recommended air pressure from the vehicle manufacturer as listed on a sticker located on the vehicle's door jamb, glove box door or in the owner's manual.
- **Check tire tread depth**—If the tread depth is less than 3 mm, it's time to buy new tires.
- **Inspect tires monthly**—Knowing what to look for is only useful if you actually take the time to look. Get in the habit of frequently inspecting tires for proper inflation, damage or wear. If something doesn't look right, take your car to a tire dealer for closer inspection.
- **Replace tires properly**—If you only replace two tires at a time, mount them on the rear axle. Otherwise, your car could lose rear traction in the rain and spin out.
- **Proper alignment is important**—Have your car's suspension realigned when you buy new tires, if you notice uneven wear or if it has been a while since your last alignment. A suspension that is not aligned properly can wear out new tires after only a few thousand kilometers and adversely affect fuel consumption.

Motor show sponsor

EAST West Bank's aggressive drive in establishing a foothold in the consumer business is being felt through its active support and participation of car dealer's activities.

Only recently, the bank supported the Nissan Motor Show organized by Mantrade Development Corp., a major dealer of Nissan cars in the Philippines.

Through its marketing agent, East West Finance and Leasing Corp. (EWFLC), the bank was one of the sponsors of the trade show which gathered Frontier, X-Trail, Nissan Urvan, Nissan Patrol and other Nissan top-of-the-line units on display.

EWB president Elrey T. Ramos and Mantrade president and CEO Kurt Bachmann Jr. led the ribbon cutting rites during the recent Nissan exhibit held at Market! Market!, Taguig City.

EWFLC has been actively supporting Mantrade's activities to provide prospective and existing Nissan car owners with competitive car financing packages. According to Gaspar Antonio delos Santos, EWFLC's head of operations, customers can expect more special deals from the bank's Car Suite Loan.

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LIFESTYLE

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2207 (Globe) or 283 (Smart)

Editor **Chelo Banal-Formoso**

P99
Dunkin' Donuts
Choco Rings

Abstain and inspire

THE 2bU! correspondents agreed. No-meat days are no longer such a sacrifice, not when all your favorite restaurants have whipped up mouth-watering Lent specials. This Holy Week, we decided to do something different. We abstained from our obsessions and indulgences, if only for a few days. One brave soul even tried to survive a weekend without sight. We gave up swearing, complaining and being judgmental. We tried to live without mirrors, blogs, guitars, signature flip flops, sweets, books, alcohol, cable TV and mobile phones. Some of us succeeded, some of us failed.

But we all learned lessons.

In this issue, read about our attempts at abstinence and be inspired by the amazing volunteer efforts of a young man in Thailand's tsunami-wrecked Khao Lak area.

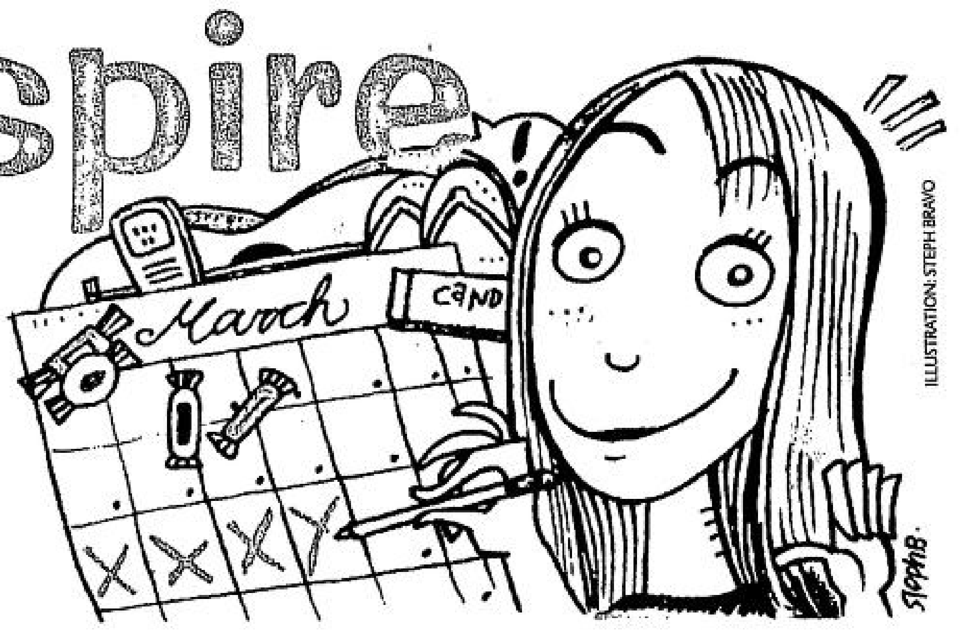


ILLUSTRATION: STEPH BRAVO

While my guitar gently sleeps

By Christian B. Bautista
2bU! Correspondent

FOR this issue, some people vowed not to eat sweets. Some swore to give up cable TV for a week. One guy even agreed to stay blindfolded for a weekend, which I think is just plain crazy.

Being the slacker that I am, I knew there was no way I could stick to anything as difficult as the things other 2bU! correspondents came up with.

Since they've covered all the hard stuff, I thought I figured I should come up with the most half-ass thing to abstain from.

It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it. So for a whole week, I vowed to keep my hands off my guitar.

Now, I do love my guitar. It took quite some time for me to save up for my axe, an Ibañez GRX40. I also have a Sta. Mesa-made acoustic, which I've hardly touched since I got my Ibañez.

But unlike B.B. King, I probably wouldn't go into a burning building to save a guitar, even if it was a Gibson.

Even now that I've been playing for around seven years, I only pick up the guitar whenever I feel like it. And even back when I was taking lessons, it wasn't unusual for me to go a few days without it. So when I thought of giving up my guitar for a week, it really never occurred to me that I would have any trouble.

To be honest, at times, I feel like smashing the darn thing when I can't get a lick right, which, I might add, happens quite often.

Routine

For some time now, I've been unemployed and out of school so I've got my routine down pat. My day usually consists of around 10 hours in front of the tube, a couple of hours surfing the net, then a few more hours tinkering with my guitar.

I actually tried to schedule an hour outside to soak in some sun like they do with inmates, but I thought better of it when I realized I actually had to put on a pair of shoes. Anyway, it didn't all go to waste, since I got to spend a few more hours watching pro wrestling.

So you can imagine how giving up my Ibañez threw my world into a tailspin. A number of times, I had to stop myself when I mindlessly reached out for my guitar.

With very little going on, I actually started to itch for it. I particularly had a difficult time after watching a recent Session Road gig at Xaymaca. I didn't realize until recently that I've developed the habit of picking up my guitar after coming home from gigs. It doesn't matter if I only mess around with it until the sun comes up. I just have to play and try to imitate what I saw from other guitarists.

So the whole ride home, I kept thinking of how Coy Placido laid down the riffs for "Love Song" by the Cure. Now, I particularly hate it when bands play a lot of covers during gigs, but the whole time, my eyes were glued to his fret board.

Epiphany

If I'm not mistaken, he was mostly using pentatonic scales. I've been taught how to use those theoretically, but it was only when I watched him lay it down that I actually got an inkling of how to use it in a band setting.

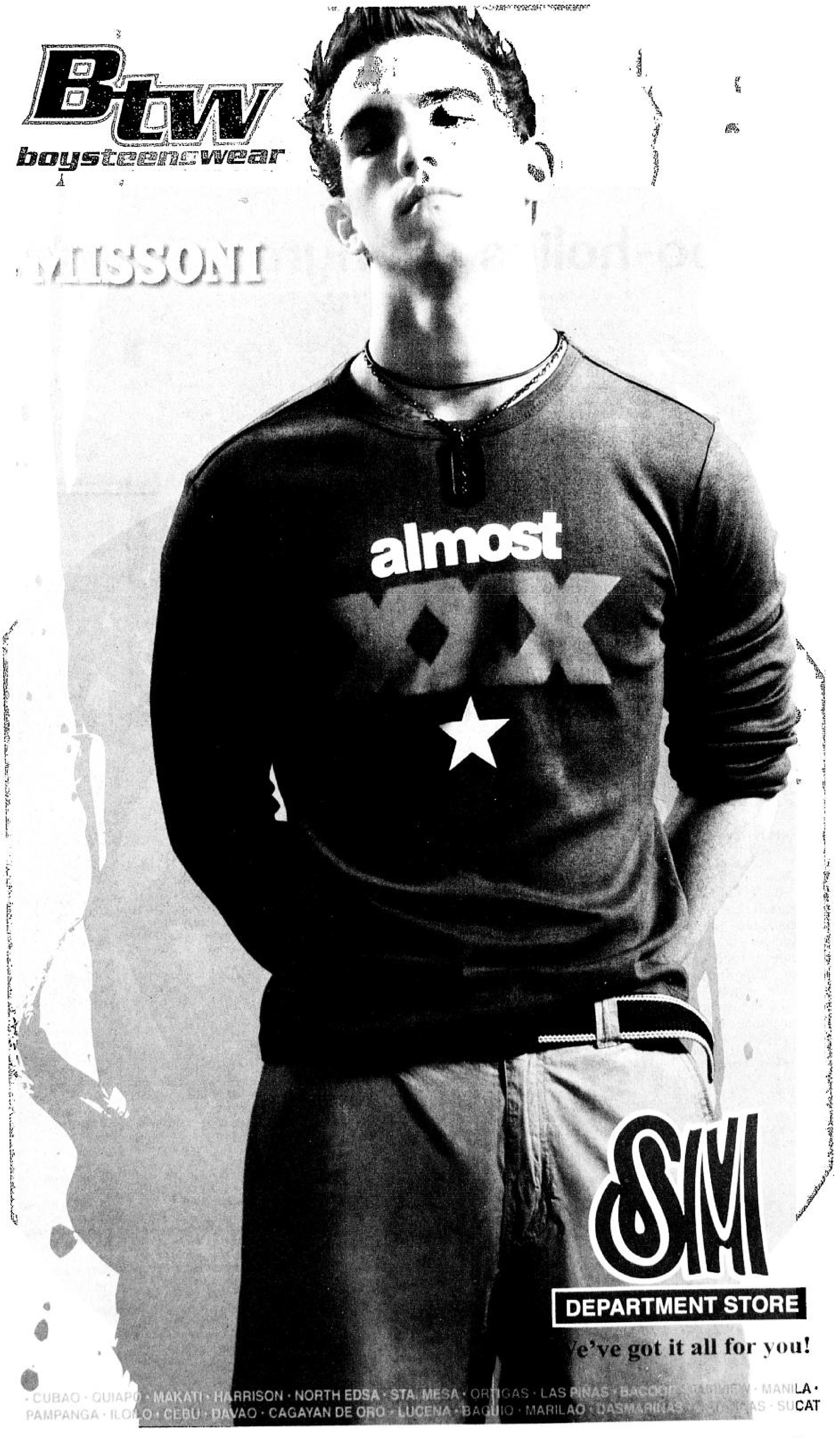
It was like an epiphany.

Finally, I got it. And I was really aching to get to my guitar. This explained the pain at the pit of my stomach when I got to my house and remembered I couldn't lay a hand on it.

I had to content myself by watching a Coldplay DVD, which, I later learned, should not be played when rooming with anyone who had to wake up at 4 a.m.

A wise woman told me there should be a moral to this story. Honestly, I don't think I've learned anything—just that I have a strong urge to once again develop blisters on my fingers.

Now pardon me while I strum on a few strings.



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How to shake a dirty mouth in 10 days

By Angela V. Ignacio
2bU! Correspondent

Abstaining from swearing turned out to be much harder than I had anticipated

FATHER Murphy was playing golf with a parishioner. On the first hole, he sliced into the rough. His opponent heard him mutter "Hoover!" under his breath.

On the second hole, the ball went straight into a water hazard. He muttered "Hoover!" again, a little louder this time.

On the third hole, a miracle occurred and Fr. Murphy's drive landed on the green only six inches from the hole! "Praise be to God!" The priest exclaimed. He carefully lined up the putt, but the ball curved around the hole instead of going in. "Hoover!"

By this time, his opponent couldn't withhold his curiosity any longer, and asked why the priest kept saying "Hoover". To which Fr. Murphy replied, "It's the biggest dam I know."

Tee-hee.

Ten days ago, I made a promise to abstain from swearing for a given number of days. That meant no name-calling, no using the Lord's name in vain, no offensive gestures and absolutely no derogatory four-letter words in any derivation or language whatsoever.

Frankly speaking, it's turning out to be harder than I thought.

Lest my parents and habit-wearing mentors come after me, let me make it clear that swearing is not something I'm particularly fond of doing. Like most people, I only swear when I'm angry, shocked or frustrated, or when I do something incredibly stupid.

Also, my cussing can hardly be classified as downright profane, although I do have my own set of colorful words that I use from time to time. Besides, since I tend to cuss more often nowadays due to stress and mental burnout, it seemed like abstaining from it was the perfect act of contrition to do in preparation for Holy Week.

So how hard could it possibly be not to swear for a few days? This would be a piece of cake, I said to myself rather smugly.

Boy, was I ever wrong.

Everyday vocabulary

It's amazing (or appalling) how deeply ingrained some cuss words are in my everyday vocabulary without my realizing it.

It doesn't matter how mild or common they are. What bothered me was not noticing that I could hardly control myself from blurting them out. Classic example: Monday was supposed to be the day I started my abstinence period, but I tripped on my own feet and said the S-word. Oops.

I postponed it to Tuesday, vowing there would be no more exceptions. It was closing week for our magazine, which meant I had to exert extra effort not to cuss out of pure stress.

I forced myself to be a bit more creative with my expressions. I tried safer (but phonetically similar) alternatives like "fudge," "shoot" and "cramp," but I still managed to blurt out the original words.

So, I tried the "fill-in-the-blanks" method. When little accidents would happen, I'd say "poo" then conveniently trail off. When I'd experience mental block in the middle of an article, I'd go as far as "Ffffff," then bite my lip hard.

Even the occasional boor I'd encounter while commuting was spared from my temper. When a bystander would let out catcalls, I'd keep my fist clenched to prevent a certain finger from shooting up in response.

Overall, this method seemed to work, but it still wasn't effective enough, especially when my computer hung while I was rushing the several articles. I couldn't help it. I just howled a big, fat four-letter word.

Primitive method

By Wednesday, I realized how futile this abstinence was fast becoming, so I decided to put a price on it—literally. Adopting a primitive but very efficient method from my grade school days, I started a "cuss fund" where I would drop a 1-peso coin for every expletive coming out of my mouth.

I thought to myself that if sheer force of will couldn't cut it, then maybe innate stinginess could. And sure enough, it worked... for a while.

At the office, my editors and friends couldn't help but laugh at my feeble attempts. As my sole witnesses, naturally they were only too happy to help me fill up the jar as fast as possible.

They'd keep their ears peeled for anything I'd utter, and sometimes they'd even trick me into spitting out a mild curse word, so I'd have no choice but to pay the fine.

"Snack fund," the supportive little devils called it. Too bad for them, I'd already decided I'd give the money away to charity at the end of my abstinence period. Call it guilt-tripping, but I figured that if having a cuss-free day was well-nigh impossible, then I might as well give the profits to someone who could use a little money.

In a world where expletives spice up everyday conversations, it's difficult to be phonetically bland. It's officially been a week since I've started my abstinence period, and I can't say for sure I've been successful at it or not.

To be honest, I don't know whether to congratulate myself for not filling up the jar, or to whack myself for having had to put something in it in the first place.

Then again, I think the cuss fund did more good than harm, and still does. That's why I've decided to continue this little "project" for as long as I'm able to.

While it didn't really stop me from using dirty language altogether, it certainly left my mouth feeling a whole lot cleaner than it used to be.

Besides, all those coins won't go to waste. Never mind that it's making a considerable dent in my weekly budget. When the time comes, every curse word I make will hopefully be someone else's blessing.

E-mail the author at aoshi_no_miko@atenista.net.

Choco-holics anonymous

By Francine Palines
2bU! Correspondent

I CAN'T deny it, I get my sugar fix every day.

Sugar—the stuff dreams, wishes and beautiful cheesecakes are made out of. I crumble down like a freshly baked, ultra delicate chocolate soufflé at the thought of its non-existence.

Literally, the world is a much sweeter place with it around. And thanks to the creative ingenuity of today's connoisseurs, sugar looks even better than before.

This is why it took some time for my brain to register exactly what my editor wanted me to do—to try and give up chocolate for a few days.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 meaning I had to move to an isolated island to accomplish this task, it rated a 7.

It was quite difficult when I shared a household with some notorious folks: Hershey, Ferrero, Lindt and my personal favorite—Reese.

Unfortunately, this is not one of those pot-in-the-end-of-the-rainbow stories where the persona endures pathetic trials and tribulations, gives off blood, sweat and tears, and maybe even manages to get a French tip broken in the process.

Because while the first few paragraphs were written before the sacrificial process even started, I started having withdrawal syndromes immediately. No kidding.

I put aside my stash and hid a few others behind the array of biscuits in the pantry, realizing too late they were Milano biscuits-yes, chocolate filled.

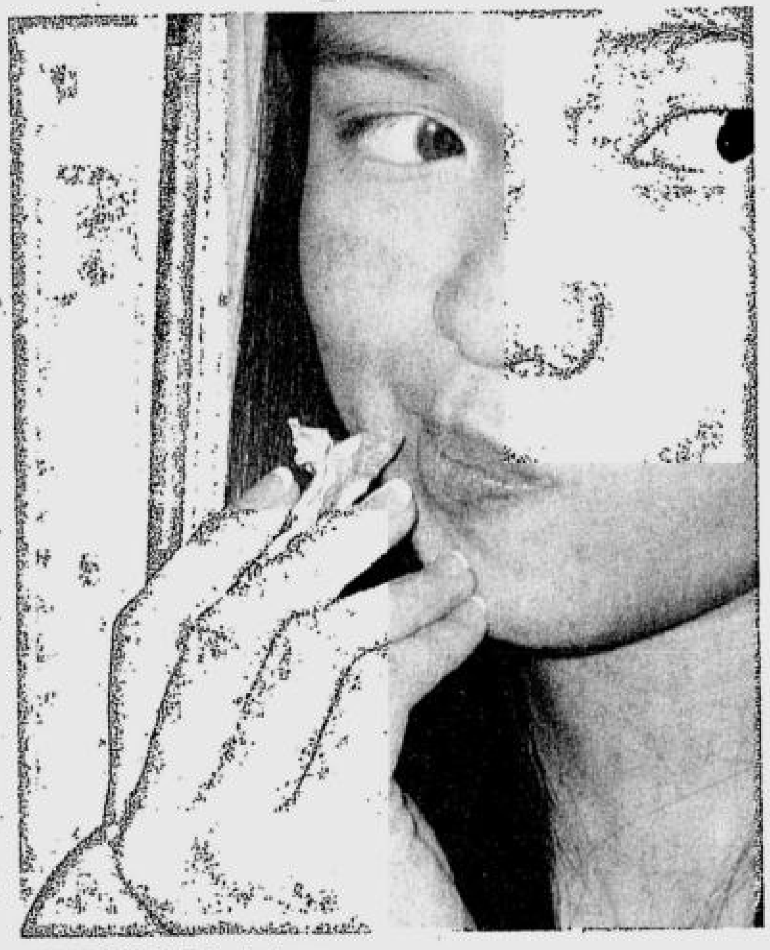
So I didn't even get to the third paragraph of this article before I found myself nibbling on a Bacci. To put it simply, I failed. Pathetically.

And the result is this article, a shorter version of what was supposed to be a detailed chronicle of my angst-driven, insulin-deprived moments.

So I failed. I didn't even last a day.

But that doesn't mean I'm not going to try again. Even if I'd rather give up eating real food than give up chocolate, I'm still going to try. After I go visit that new dessert place tomorrow.

E-mail the author at prancing_hipp0@yahoo.com



CHOCO-HOLIC on the loose

Textus un-interruptus

By Arlene M. Paredes
2bU! Correspondent

The 'texting thumb' was more than willing, but the circumstances were not helpful

BACK in the late '90s, I was so addicted to texting that I could have founded Text Addicts Anonymous and been a terrible counselor to those who have yet to live a day without jolting at the sound of their cell phone's beep.

But four cell phone models later, I am no longer the texting queen. I've been named "kuripot" and "dead-ma girl" ever since I stopped replying to "how u?" and "*san k?*"

But I couldn't care less. One obsession was gone and my texting thumb has been trained to reply only to SMS that are classified as important and/or urgent. Goodbye, forwarded messages; goodbye, prepaid cards. I was free!

However, when I got the assignment to abstain from using my phone, I just couldn't do it. I thought all I needed was a night of "conditioning" (I'm not a text addict anymore, but I still text a few close friends who live outside the city), but it turned out, even one whole week was not enough a "conditioning period" to help me out.

I should've set off the abstinence Monday night, but I had to postpone it to Tuesday, and then Wednesday, and before I knew it, it was the deadline date already. Drat!

Anyone would say I should just have turned off my phone. Well, I couldn't bring myself to do it because I couldn't fight the thought that the next SMS or call might be very important.

For one, I was actually waiting for a phone call from a potential part-time employer. No, make that three potential part-time employers. All writing jobs. Add to that two editors and one (Japanese) translator.

On top of these, I needed to interview someone for another article and the only way I could contact him was through his mobile phone, as he was always on the go. I figured I'd just let my cell phone on, read the SMS but I won't reply unless really necessary.

Once again, I forgot that there was something more important than business: relationships. I was late for a meeting, I had to text. One of my best friends said she was sick and she thought my late mother was visiting her, so I had to reply. At least three other friends were in serious need of a shrink, and that shrink would be me so it felt wrong not to text back.

Yes, before I knew it, my planned 2bU! article—"I abstained from using my phone for one week!"—had slowly deleted itself from my mind.

If anything good came out of my attempt to abstain from using my phone, it was the realization (yet again) that my cell phone is more useful than it has ever seemed to me at any time, even if it has no camera, MMS or WAP features.

My good old 3310 is a reliable ally in keeping me close to people and situations that matter to me. Giving it up meant giving up my virtual connection to the world.

I may have been unsuccessful in my attempt to abstain from using my cell phone. But that doesn't mean I'll never be able to abstain from anything at all. Next week I'll try forsaking ice cream. Wait and see.

E-mail the author at lhen@postmark.net.

ILLUSTRATION: STEPH BRAVO

Over and out

By Saleema Devi Refran
2bU! Correspondent

Like going on a diet, avoiding my fave shows on cable TV was stressful in the beginning

I LIVE on what's on the boob tube. I wake up to the sound of TV every morning. Yes, I sleep with that sound too. I know TV schedules by heart. I know which days, what times and which channels "American Idol" is aired. I know when "Amazing Race" is aired on local and cable TV. I also know when the replays are.

Call me a cable TV addict. I throw tantrums when we don't have cable. Actually, I'm quite popular with the customer service associates. I bug them like crazy to explain when the line conks out (which, by the way, happens quite often).

So as you can imagine, abstaining from cable TV was a challenge. But I had to be thankful that it wasn't abstaining from television viewing completely. That would have killed me.

Like going on a diet, abstaining from cable TV is difficult in the beginning. I carefully plotted which day to start my fast. Monday was a good day. There was nothing interesting on cable TV. So I went on to satisfy my craving with what closely resembles it on local TV.

Instead of watching the "Today Show" on ETC, I went on to channel surf between ABS-CBN's "Magandang Umaga Bayan" and GMA's "Unang Hirit." I don't know if it's just me but, I felt the "MUB" set was a bit gloomy. "Unang Hirit's" set was lively and okay, but every time Arn-arn appeared, I felt sad. I remembered Kiko Matsing and Pong Pagong from "Batibot" instead (the best Filipino-produced kid's show of all time. Heck, I'd ditch Elmo and Big Bird for a dose of Ning-ning, Ging-ging and Kapitan Basa again).

Anyhow, both shows have this "morning-boring syndrome" to them. Like they start off strong but lose steam somewhere in the middle. I was almost about to lose it and switch to ETC and watch my favorites Al Roker and Katie Couric in "Today" when I remembered I had to get to school to get my resumes out for summer internship. I was, for lack of a better term, saved by the bell.

Arriving after lunch, I figured I can still manage to stay away from cable. My *lola* watches the noontime shows. That was a good reason to stay on local TV. But I remembered I hated afternoon shows. I hate watching drama on afternoons, plus there's always something good on Discovery Channel on afternoons—replays of primetime specials they had the night before.

My brilliant idea? Sleep. There. Problem solved. That was enough to get me through the afternoon itch.

Evening viewing proved to be harder. There were other elements conspiring to ruin my abstinence—my sisters. To save myself from their ridicule, I didn't tell them I was to veer away from cable TV.

Since we always watched the news, the pre-primetime shows were pretty much covered. The Camp Bagong Diwa stakeout kept me pretty much occupied. For once during the entire day, I had my mind off the cable TV abstinence deal. Well, that's if you don't count the time I was taking a power nap.

Primetime was surprisingly easy. I watched the telenovela block. Man, that will really make you lose track of time!

"Kamao" was good. It was a bit too bad it was on air roughly around the same time AXN had Sylvester Stallone's "The Contender." The guys who fought on the pilot episode threw some very strong punches. I could see how one punch that landed on the other guy's face caused a very defined sweat spray. I bet the guys on "CSI" would love that. Oops. Cable TV again.

The other *telenovelas* were okay. Very predictable but entertaining enough. I couldn't wait for this abstinence to be over so I could get my cable TV back.

The next morning, I said to myself, "Screw it!" I couldn't live without cable TV. "American Idol" was on. I later found out "AI" will be on air the next day. Damn. It's Anwar Robinson's fault.

That was it. I never got to do it again. Just like all the diet programs I tried. Where was the cable interruption when you needed one? If we didn't have cable, I would have done it easily.

But then it made me think. I was being so selfish. Most people didn't even have cable, not even color TVs. Some didn't even have electricity and here I was not lasting two days without cable!

Yes, there is more to life than cable TV. I don't need cable TV at all. I just make it a necessity because I've become accustomed to it.

I guess this is my foiled abstinence backfiring on me. Instead of feeling relieved after not having cable TV for a day, I felt the opposite. My parents better be reading this. I just might donate our TV!

E-mail the author at s_a_l_e_e_m_a@yahoo.com

Blogs, begone!

I'd been blogging for three years now, so prying myself away from the keyboard was sheer torture

By Marla Cabanban
2bU! Correspondent

ILLUSTRATION:ANTHONY MISTADES

NO blogging until Easter.

Okay, that isn't impressive (especially since I only started the last week before Easter). That doesn't require a lot of pain or gore, or patience.

Hey, but it's the only Lenten sacrifice I seem to be able to do successfully so far. I first started out with a "drink nothing but water" sacrifice, but my lips locked onto the rim of the first beer bottle handed to me during a party right after Ash Wednesday. So scratch that.

The next sacrifice involved not eating breakfast. That alone was already a death sentence. I'm already underweight and I zonked through my first class during Day One. So scratch that again.

Why is getting rid of blogging perfect and painful? 1) I've been blogging for three years already, and 2) I post an average of two entries per day.

I'm self-absorbed and conceited and I enjoy letting my friends know about the latest calculus test I failed, my newest tale of woe with my boyfriend, and which dysfunctional care bear I am.

This sacrifice is a two-fold sacrifice. If the first part involves refor you," the second aspect of it involves quitting blog stalking.

Yes, you heard me, blog stalking. It means I will hold myself back from reading every event my friends write about in their own blogs. No more Internet chismis. No more commenting "hahahaha!" "Yes, that's so true" "Omg! Really?"

I will quit hounding after celebrity blogs, teenybopper fan girl blogs (you know, the ones that scream, "I love Spongecola! Yael, marry me!"), and high-society rich people blogs. Sometimes they amuse me, sometimes they cially the last two).

And I think I just defined what a guilty pleasure is.

I kind of got surprised to see in print what my whole Internet existence revolves around on. I thought of giving it up for a while because, yes, I admit it's a trivial and shallow past time.

It may be true that blogging can whip out a gem when an entry happens to be well thought of and insightful. But that rarely happens to me.

I think I need time off to start really thinking, not just rant or rave online. My spying on the things that happen to my friends can wait, since it's been a while since I had actual offline connections with them. It'll motivate me, too, to stop being stingy and just text them to go out or something.

So how has it been so far? Annoying, mostly. I had to keep restraining myself from posting notes about the last day of school, the hell I suffered during finals week, or some online survey (my quickest remedy for boredom).

I actually got over the urge pretty quickly, and the abstaining pushes me to be more creative in finding things to do. I've started reading some of my books again, watching movies, studying and making time to pray and go to confession ('tis Lent, after all).

During finals week, I was more focused on my research and typing. No more side trips to "What Kind of Bra Are You?" Guess I'm doing okay.

Well, not quite. I finally broke during the last day of school. With nothing to do and with the intense craving of spying, I went back to scrolling through my blog's friends list.

And went back to commenting, "hahahaha!" "Yes, that's so true" "Omg! Really?"

But I will not post. I won't, I won't, I won't.

2BU! PROMO

Win 'American Idol' goodies!

WE at 2bU! were able to predict it. We knew Lindsey Cardinale was going home. This week, we have eleven finalists left to root for. Do you think any of the rockers will go home this week?

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E-mail your answers to the following questions to americanidol_on_starworld@yahoo.com. The first five people who will send correct answers will win.

Week of March 21, 2005

1. Who replaced Mario Vasquez who quit for personal reasons?
2. Who was eliminated among the twelve finalists?
3. What are the songs that Constantine Maroulis has sung so far?
4. Who from the third season appeared just recently as a guest in the Micheal Krogmann Late Night Fox Show?
5. Which season has the record for the highest number of contestants?

Catch "American Idol" on Star World with direct off satellite telecasts on Wednesday and Thursday at 4 p.m. and primetime replays at 8 p.m.

Winners for Week of March 14:

1. Jamir Tan
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3. Vivian Aguilar
4. Lance Manahan
5. Jake Yrastorza

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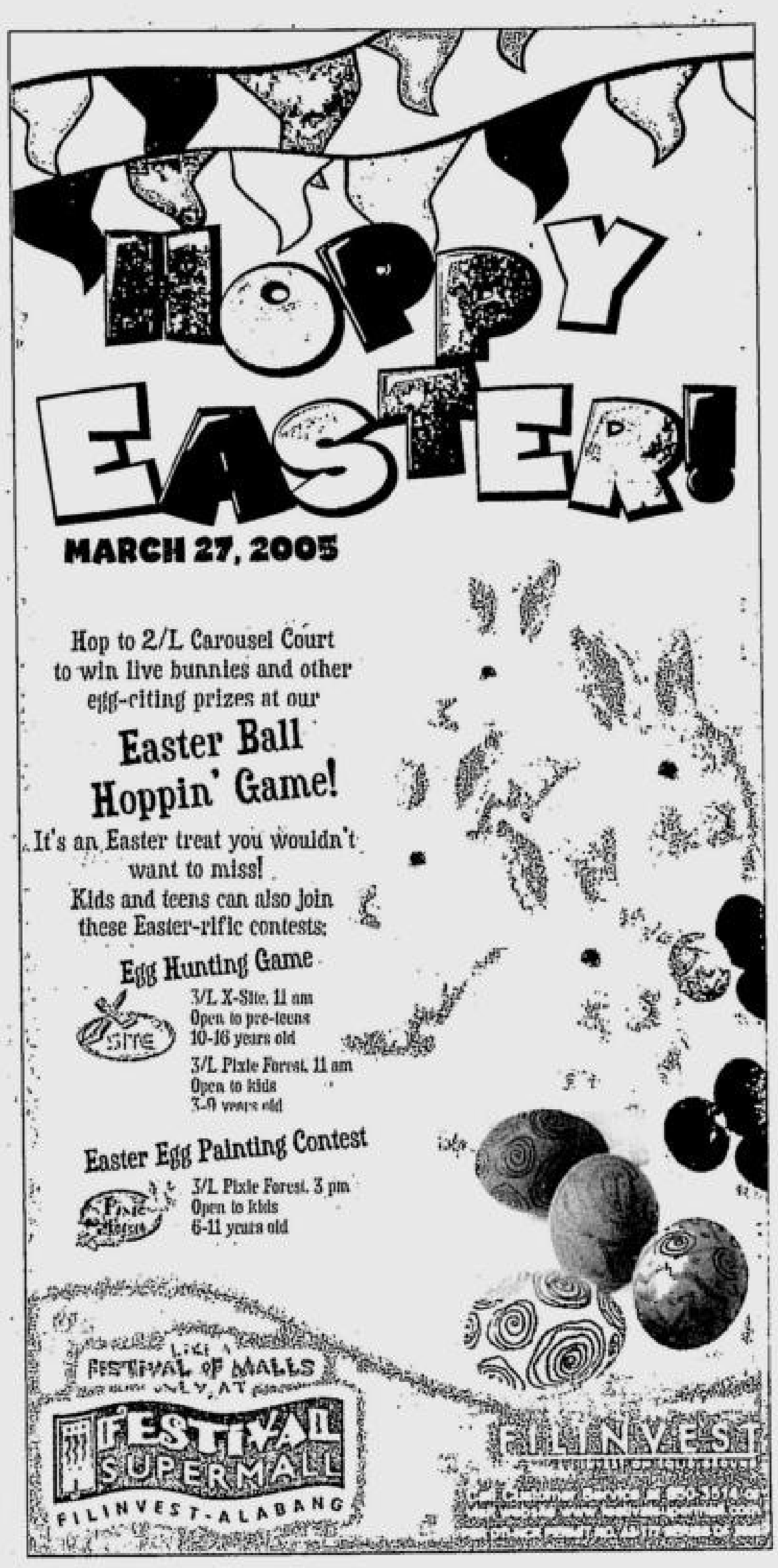
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Open to kids
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3/L Pixie Forest. 3 pm
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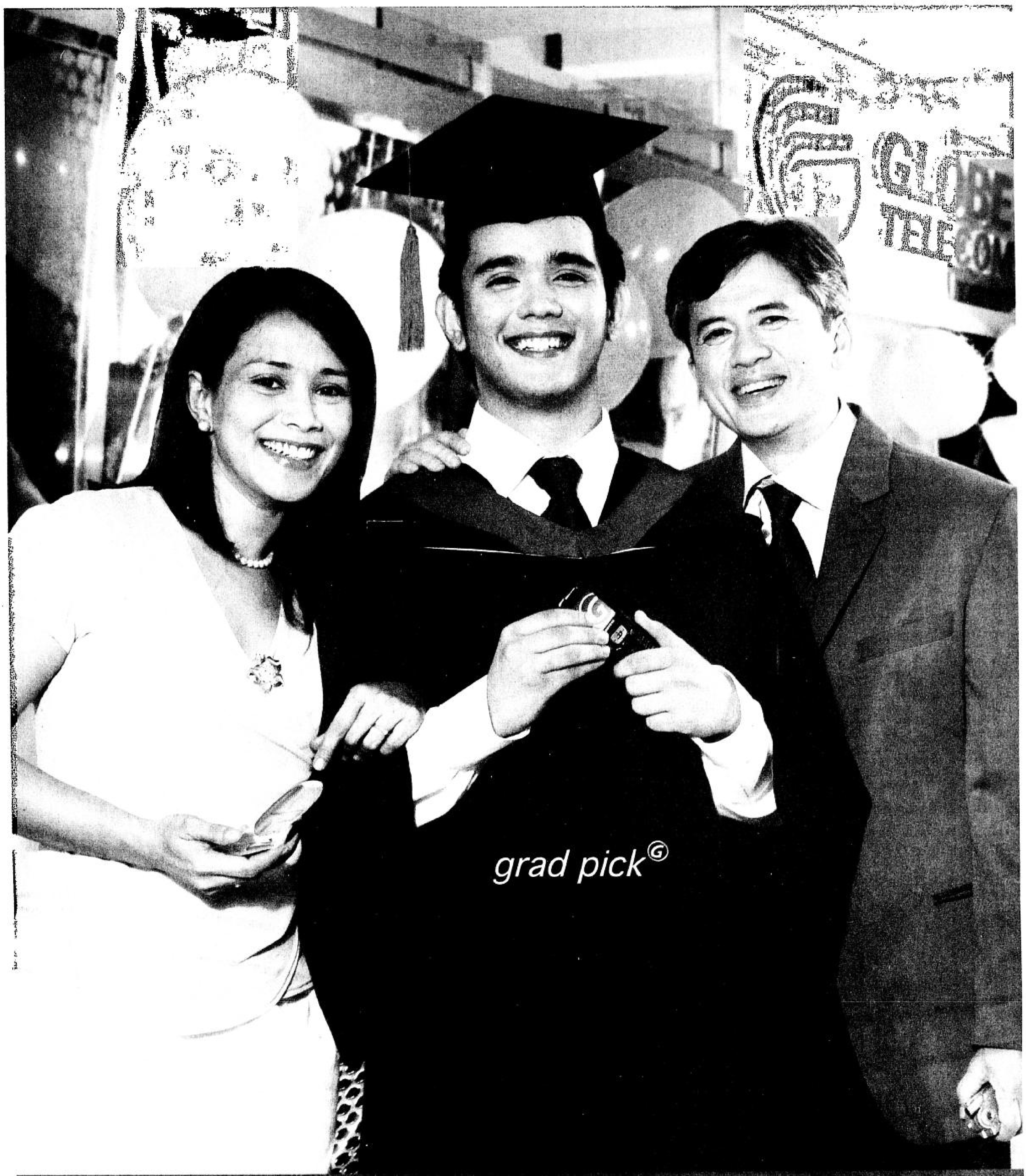

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Samsung E310	8,000	5,500	8,000	5,500	2,500	FREE	FREE	FREE	FREE
Nokia 7610	20,000	17,500	20,000	17,500	14,500	8,500	FREE	FREE	FREE
Samsung P730	19,000	16,500	19,000	16,500	13,500	7,500	FREE	FREE	FREE
Samsung D500	20,000	17,500	20,000	17,500	14,500	8,500	FREE	FREE	FREE
Nokia 7280	26,000	23,500	26,000	23,500	20,500	14,500	5,500	FREE	FREE
Nokia 6630	28,000	25,500	28,000	25,500	22,500	16,500	7,500	FREE	FREE
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Out of sight, out of mind

ILLUSTRATION: ANTHONY MISTADES

Having vision makes one blind to the beauty of the world and the simple pleasures of life

By Javier Mata
2bU! Correspondent

WHEN the assignment was given for us to have a special abstention for Lent, I tried to think of the one sacrifice that would really cause me more than a little bit of aggravation. Being a big media buff, I originally thought of giving up video games, but then I realized I was very adaptive in my tastes: I could watch TV, movies, read novels, play board games... there wouldn't be a real sacrifice on my part.

Then I realized all my hobbies had one thing in common: all required visual aid. Why not give up the use of my eyes? Not only am I giving up most of my hobbies, I'm also giving something most people rely on to function.

The mere emphasis on the use of eyes in the modern world belies the magnitude of the sacrifice I would be doing for a couple of days. Besides, the movie "Daredevil" came to mind and somewhere in my faulty head, a little voice said being blind might be cool.

Beforehand, I made crucial preparations. I tried to memorize the layout of my home: the number of steps in my stairs, the dimensions of the walls, etc. I put within arm's reach several needed objects (like my toothbrush).

Admittedly, I left two instances to open my eyes for good reason: dinner with my parents to celebrate their anniversary, and the Holy Mass.

No comic-book hero

But it became apparent that I was no "Daredevil." The first problem surfaced immediately. All my memorization of spatial outlays were all for nothing... When you lose sight your perception becomes ridiculously skewed. You think you went two steps forward, you actually took two really big ones... and went way past your intended destination. Carefully laid plans would be thrown out the window and you would begin to rely only on instinct.

That was pretty much all I had for the whole endeavor... instinct and embarrassment as I tripped on pretty much everything. The next time someone tells me that the Daredevil's ability was simplistic, I'm going to swing a bat at the guy... it's harder than it looks.

The second problem was even worse. I could deal with the tripping, the fumbling, the frustration of not finding what you were looking for... I could bear them all. What I couldn't bear was the extreme boredom of not having anything to pass the time with. No TV, video games or movies, not even books.

Oh sure, I could listen to music, but that could only take you so far. And let me tell you, having to change the CD of your player without knowing what the CD is—that's no fun at all. And don't get me started about trying to change the batteries.

I tried exercising with my dumbbells, but that only lasted a couple of hours and only caused me to sweat and have to take a bath blind—not an easy task.

To add insult to injury, I had to listen to the Paqiuao-Morales match. I listened to a boxing match! How pathetic could I get?

Result: Sacrifice came from days of embarrassing fumbles and trips and unbearable boredom for a guy who lives on media high.

So what did I learn from this? At the risk of cliché, I began to appreciate the world more. One thing I gained is discipline. I also now admire the stoicism and perseverance of those who are blind not by choice.

Looking back, I'm not too sure on the wisdom of my choice of abstinence. But I certainly learned discipline, perseverance, appreciation of others... and that I would lose my mind if I ever lost my sight.

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Seeing more without a mirror

By Bianca Consunji
2bU! Correspondent

JUST how many times a day do you look at yourself in the mirror?

The mirror is an essential item in everyday life. And it isn't just for vain people—it is used for all sorts of reasons: by giggling *colegialas* who want to make sure their tight skirts don't show panty lines, by nervous college graduates who want to make a good first impression for a job interview, by motorists who want to squeeze in between other cars, by perverts who want to peep at the skirts of unsuspecting women, by wicked queens who want to be the fairest in the land...

The Arts and Letters building in UP Diliman does not contain mirrors in any of its washrooms in all its five floors (well... the ladies' rooms don't have them—nothing to help them analyze the sudden earth-shattering zits on their noses, nothing to help them know when there's too much blush on their cheeks.)

However, vanity is not limited to women—I can imagine many guys have spent bragging sessions in the locker rooms, comparing their packages in front of an impartial judge.

Four days without a mirror are four days of disaster

From the start, I knew that not looking at a mirror for an entire week was impossible. Other correspondents chose to give up things that mattered to them—I couldn't think of a single thing that would be difficult for me to give up for a week, with my cell phone and computer being out of the question

Then the editor suggested, how about not looking at a mirror for a week? Aha, here was the challenge. Many people think that only vain people could not live without mirrors. You'd be surprised at how hard it is to manage without them, vain or not.

Mirrors give a sense of confidence that everything's all right—there's nothing stuck between your teeth, your fly isn't open, and no enormous zit is sitting on your nose. So going out into the big bad world without checking the mirror made me feel paranoid, thinking that somehow, something was missing. No matter how many times my friends told me there was nothing wrong with me, there was no confirmation from the only person I could fully trust: myself.

Self-portraits

So I looked for ways to go about the no-mirror rule. I carried my digital camera around with me all the time, taking self-portraits of my teeth after meals, making sure that no remnants of the spinach salad would be seen. I dressed in really grungy-looking clothes, with the excuse that looking sloppy from the start was better than looking sloppy without wanting to (by accidentally smearing lipstick on my cheek, etc.) Anything remotely shiny—gold paneling in hotel rooms, windows of cars, just as long as it wasn't a real mirror—served as my looking glass.

After a few days of this, I woke up sleepily, trudged into the bathroom, looked up—and was shocked. A million little bumps had appeared on my face, courtesy of a sunscreen I was trying out. Apparently, I was allergic to it, but I didn't stop using it immediately because I didn't see the disaster site my skin had turned into, and I was therefore unable to do any damage control. That was the day my experiment ended, and also the same day the sunscreen was chucked out. It lasted four days (the experiment, that is.)

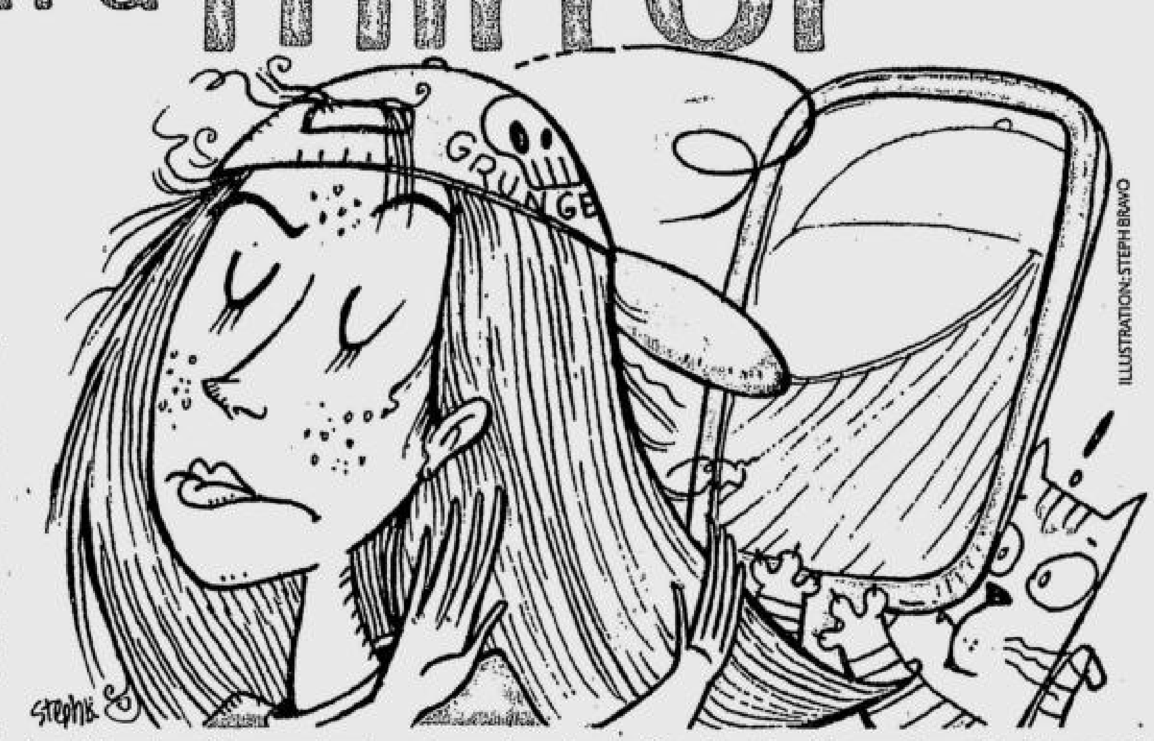


ILLUSTRATION: STEPH BRAVO

Despite the short-lived arrangement, however, I was able to realize some things: about how obsessed we are with appearances, for one thing. And knowing how one looks can change his/her whole attitude. Even if I partly cheated and took photos of myself, it just wasn't the same as looking in a mirror—I couldn't see everything in living, breathing detail.

Just as long as I didn't look too strange, I was happy. But when I saw the gazillion dots sprinkled on my forehead with that teeny glimpse at a mirror, I freaked out: I hid my face with my hair, looked down when I thought people were staring at me, and tried out every anti-blemish product known to man. I also peeked at the mirror constantly, praying that the hideous rash had subsided.

I wouldn't recommend giving up mirrors for extended periods, especially if you are in the habit of interacting with other people (it does strange things to you—pretty soon, you start attacking anyone who even glances at your face.) But it is a relief to not have to worry about or even care what you look like every once in a while. Besides, if vanity is the devil's favorite sin, he'd find an easy target if you spend half your day preening at the mirror.

E-mail biancaconsunji@yahoo.com

Confessions of a flip flop fanatic

By Pam Pastor

Hi, I'm Pam and I'm a Havaianas junkie.

When you Google "Havaianas addict," my blog is result number one.

People continually question this obsession, wisecracking that they can buy local tsinelas for a fraction of the price of Brazil-made ones.

But those who own a pair know that Havaianas are extremely, unbelievably comfortable. No matter how hard I'm working, my feet feel like they're on eternal vacation mode.

These slippers are so flexible you can bend them and fold them and the rubber still wouldn't go out of shape. They may cost more than your regular pair of flip flops but if you wear them as often as I do in place of regular shoes, they no longer seem an indulgence.

I was interviewed by "Jessica Soho Reports" about my collection—and yes, my obsession. That segment came out right before a story on homeless people in Boracay, making me look like a complete bimbo, but that's beside the point.

Every time I go to Glorietta, I make it a point to stop by Rustan's U, just in case they have more pairs in my size. My face is familiar to the salespeople there. Some of them greet me as if we are old friends.

I am a walking Havaianas ad. My passion for these flip flops is so strong I have convinced people to buy their own pairs.

When I travel, I hand-carry my Havaianas. That paid off during my last trip abroad because they accidentally left our luggage in Bangkok.

A week without my comfy pair of Havaianas? The horrors!

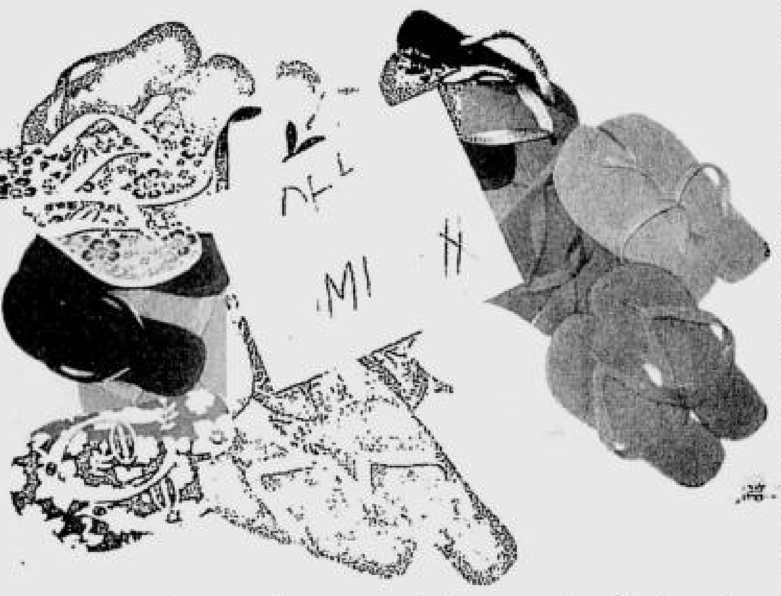
Sixteen pairs of beautiful Brazilian flip flops line my shoe racks. A lot of them I bought for myself, some of them gifts from my boyfriend and my cousins. And since they entered my life, I have started ignoring my other shoes. I wear them almost every day. The straps have actually left tan lines on my feet.

I have worn them everywhere—from beaches and malls to jungles and parties—even when the dress code says cocktail attire. I already have immaculate white Havaianas, which I intend to wear to my own wedding. The tags are still on them.

I'm in love and it's serious.

So you can imagine the horror I felt during our brainstorming session, when the 2bU! correspondents shouted at me, "No Havaianas!"

Not being one to turn down a challenge, I smiled, looked down at the Style Havaianas I was wearing that afternoon and braced myself for the next few days.



Day one

I wore Converse Chuck Taylors to work. When I arrived, I said, "I'm not allowed to wear Havaianas." I swear, I heard audible gasps. I wiggled my toes inside the sneakers. They were comfy, I thought. This would be a breeze.

Day two

I was about to bring down food for the cats in the garage when I realized I couldn't even wear my Havaianas at home. I dug up an old pair of Banana Peel flip flops and proceeded to make the little kitties happy. When I left for work, I had a pair of Pony sneakers on. Because an interview brought me to the mall, I was sorely tempted to head over to Aura Athletica to check out their new Havaianas. Until I realized that I wasn't supposed to buy new pairs either. That night, I projected my desires on my boyfriend. "You want to buy new Havaianas right? Come on, let's go to Celio and choose a new pair for you." But he ignored my wheedling.

Day three

I realized that if I was going to do this whole abstinence thing, I should start taking it seriously. So I removed the wallpaper of mine and my boyfriend's feet wearing our precious pairs on the beach from my mobile phone. I stayed away from the room where I kept my shoe racks. Out of sight, out of mind, that sort of thing. And I left the house wearing flip flops that were hand-beaded by young designer Rain Lu. They were lovely and yes, they were comfy too, but I found myself missing my Havaianas—all of them. Then I remembered that a package from my childhood friend in the US was set to arrive mid-March. She was sending me new pairs. Please don't let it be this week, please don't let it be this week, I prayed. Their arrival would make this challenge impossible.

Day four

I decided to write a heartfelt letter to my flip flops. "To my darling Havaianas, trust me, I've been ignoring you for a reason..." I began my message. The pink glittery sneakers that were my major Shanghai fashion find and have been a constant attention-grabber annoyed me today. I found fault with everything. The shoelaces kept getting untied as I walked around the office. My feet felt suffocated. And who invented socks anyway? I was so ready to take them off. But a light shone at the end of my proverbial tunnel when Anne Arcenas-Gonzalez, Havaianas Philippines' VP for Marketing, sent me an SMS. "Pam, u must go to rustans by saturday. There's a delivery." I could hold on for two more days. Because at the end of this quick journey, on Saturday, the day this article was due, there was a lot of shopping to be done.

Day five

I got home from work at 2 a.m. and decided to cheat a little. I walked to the other room just to look at my Havaianas but was surprised to discover that they weren't there. The only logical reason was that our housekeeper had decided to wash them. Barefoot, I undid two locks and removed a wooden plank to get to the terrace. I found my Havaianas in a large basin. I traipsed back to my room.

The morning's big challenge was choosing which shoes to wear. Golas. Purple Doc Martens. Golas. I finally settled on the Golas. That evening, though, I realized I made a mistake. I had an appointment at Nail Spa and if I was going to get a pedicure, I would need open-toe shoes. I'll probably just buy something from them, I thought, making up my mind that if Havaianas were available, I would no longer resist. Unfortunately—or fortunately, it depends how you look at it—they had run out of Havaianas. I ended up purchasing a new pair of Happy Feet sandals instead.

Day six

I decided I was going to end my abstinence with a bang—by shopping for new pairs. But apparently, everyone else had the same idea. Rustan's U's Havaianas section was crazy-packed with people. Apparently, this obsession isn't mine alone. The poor guy behind the booth seemed frazzled, trying to find the right style in the right size for the right people. After jostling my way to buying a citrus orange pair of Margaridas Havaianas, I left the mob and went to Gas in Greenbelt 4 where things were more quiet. There, I was able to try on high heeled Havaianas in different colors before finally settling on white and light blue ones. And I made a decision - I would also buy heeled white Havaianas for my wedding. That means I could start wearing the flat ones I had bought months ago.

I maintain that there are worse obsessions than my endless flip flop fantasies. My big addiction is not detrimental to my health and to the welfare of those around me.

Sixteen pairs sound crazy, but not when you realize that they were bought over almost a twelve-month period. Sixteen pairs sound crazy, but not when you find out that they are my only current indulgence.

I no longer blow my paycheck on Topshop. I no longer go on mad *ukay-ukay* sessions, bringing home two garbage bags-full of winter clothes that I never get to wear.

The period of abstinence taught me that despite appearances, I still have my feet grounded on reality. That if the need arises, I can—and will—give up even my biggest obsession. But right now, I don't have to.

So allow me to float away on my Havaianas. I shall continue to wear them with pride.

A toast to alcoholic abstinence

By Cheryl Tiu
2bU! Correspondent

I'VE always had an awfully familiar relationship with alcohol. Back in high school, it played the gregarious host in nights out with friends; it was omnipresent in any form, from beer to shooter. During my university years, fancy cocktails were part of post-dinner conversations at restaurant-bars in Greenbelt.

To add to my love affair, I bartended at a hotel lounge after my summer classes last year, and even while I was living in Europe for an exchange program two years ago, it wasn't at all difficult for me to fathom (and adapt to) their culture of beer and wine being synonymous to water.

I'm not an alcoholic, I'll make that clear. I just enjoy the company of alcohol a lot.

I enjoy the company of alcohol a lot and it was only apt that I give up alcohol for one whole week as a sacrifice for the Lent

It was only apt, then, that I give up alcohol for one whole week, as a sacrifice for Lent. Sure, I thought to myself, five days... that's not so bad—until I remembered that my graduation was on Friday the 18th, which fell within my one week of alcoholic abstinence!

So Monday went by fine. I spent the whole day at home, chatting on the Internet with friends overseas.

Tuesday, I wavered a bit. I was going to have dinner out with my friend, Steph, and lately, our dinners have consisted of us having a glass of sangria, lychee martini or red wine to complement our fodder.

The moment we sat down to dinner at a restaurant in Rockwell, I announced that I was on an alcoholic abstinence for Holy Week. She looked a little surprised but didn't question me. I was a little tempted, seeing that we were at a nice restaurant-bar, but I quickly composed myself and asked the waiter for tap water.

Difficult

Wednesday turned out to be even more difficult. It was the night of the Blue Roast, our university's yearly tradition to honor graduates. The P200 entrance ticket was inclusive of a soft drink and, gulp, a beer. Some of my friends were a little bit red in the face, and invited me to be part of their jovial state by swinging cans of beer under my nose, as if hypnotizing me like a pendulum.

"I can't drink tonight," I told them over and over again, "I'm on an alcoholic abstinence for Holy Week." And while everyone reacted in disbelieving outbursts like, "What? But we're graduating!"—the best reaction I got was from a guy in my Theology class, "You know, Jesus drank a lot of wine. He turned water into wine!" I laughed out loud and was trying to compose a rebuttal when my friend, Va ,came to my defense, "Stop it, you're the devil and you're tempting her!"

ILLUSTRATION: ALBERT G. RODRIGUEZ

Thursday went by fine as it was my baby brother's birthday and we had a wholesome family dinner of take-home pizza and fried chicken, as he had requested.

Friday, a.k.a. graduation day, finally came. During grad practice, my batch mates were talking about going out to drink after our family dinners. While it was our big graduation celebration, I didn't want to go out because I so obviously knew I was going to break my pact to abstain, so I told them, "I'll see."

I had dinner with my family and relatives in a nice Chinese restaurant. The food was so good and I figured I would stuff myself so that I would have absolutely no more room to even think about popping open a bottle of champagne to celebrate with my family at home.

Luckily after dinner, a very close friend rang my mobile from overseas, which completely distracted me. When I got home, I uploaded all the photos I had taken earlier that day in graduation to my laptop, and put it on a continuous "slide show" mode all night. Just looking through the pictures put me on a nostalgia that heaved of a natural high. I didn't want to go out anymore.

I'll admit it was difficult for me to give up alcohol especially during one of the most important weeks of my life. But giving up something I really, really enjoyed and offering it up to Jesus as a sacrifice this Lent made me realize that there are many other things I can indulge on, such as the simple company of my friends and family.

For Jesus, I had given up an indulgence that to me, often constituted good times. That I fulfilled my vow of abstinence provided me a buoyant feeling that even a glass of fancy martini could never give me.

E-mail chertiu@gmail.com

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Diet from words

One week of literary abstinence is not healthy for the imagination and creativity

Catherine Young
! Correspondent

THE ORIGINAL challenge was to abstain from science for a ek, a fact that might pre- t me from graduating n college, especially ce I'm this close to going graduate school. So the y other option was to tain from the other ng I love, reading.

was 7 when I started attacking ks voraciously. After years of ex- sting Ladybird classics before I ped wetting the bed, I was in- uced to such mandatory child- l reads like Sweet Valley and cy Drew. It was all downhill from there. I started wearing glasses when I was 8, with my prescription increasing exponentially to the dismay of my mother, whose eyes have been operated on twice and who is afraid that I may suffer the same fate.

Things radically change as you grow up, but reading remained constant. Quoting from INQUIRER's editor in chief, Letty Jimenez-Magsanoc, "Reading is no big deal." Whether I'm celebrating a personal triumph or consoling myself after a fall, I just go out and get a book. Until now, I am always reading, whether waiting in line, doing my business in the bathroom, or waiting in between classes and experiments. PowerBooks Megamall has been my sanctuary for years now; I know the cashiers and the customer service personnel whom I have been bugging since the holidays to get me a decent copy of "Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs." I even say hi to the security guard who I recognize in plainclothes.

And so it was that in the interest of writing, I had to bid a temporary farewell to my stockpile of waiting-to-be-read pages of "Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell," "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time," "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," "A Glass Half Full" and "Wicked." I was in the middle of Margaret Atwood's "The Robber Bride" when this assignment fell on my lap. Reading is my oxygen, and I was to be deprived.

Bookless world

How to describe a world without books? Well, technically, mine wasn't that deprived; literary abstinence was impossible to extend to my academic books, whether I liked it or not. So without the time-transcending style of Susanna Clarke or the extraterrestrial wit of Douglas Adams, I was left with the hyper-technical world of antibodies and genetic engineering. Textbooks, no matter how interesting they are, have a tendency to strain your patience just because someone else picked them out for you.

In a nutshell, I was cranky and fidgety without good non-required books. I had nothing to relax with, and with Mario Vasquez dropping out of "American Idol," TV was not a great source of entertainment. When I would read a chapter before lights out, I was left with late night comedy shows to hypnotize me to the "Land of Nod," and there was a limit to how many Michael Jackson jokes I could take.

One reason why I had a particularly hard time abstaining from the one activity I love most was that nearly all of my friends were busy, a fact that I should have taken into account when I planned my senior year early on. I did my thesis a year early, finished grad school applications and whatnot, and did so many things ahead of time to make sure I would have time for personal relationships. Unfortunately, all my friends were now their theses, fixing job interviews or generally brooding about their lives that I did not have anyone to hang out with in this absolute bore of a week. Crud.

On the plus side, I realized how much reading took me away from other things that are equally, if not more, important. I've finally begun catching up on my immunology class, whose chapters I had left untouched because of the battery of information that left me intimidated and lost.

The most important thing I learned in a week of no reading was how much I depended on it. Being deprived from an addiction, no matter how good it might be for me, made me realize how it changed from being just a hobby to something I depended on to help me function as a human being.

Books filled the void that people just could not, not in these crossroads between college and the real world. They created a world where every event had a higher purpose, where nothing was too wonderful to come true, and where happy endings were common.

E-mail the author cathy_young1 @yahoo.com

No-judgment days

y Niño Mark M. Sablan
oU! Correspondent

I HAVE always considered myself to be a very opinionated being.

For example, whenever I watch a movie, it pesn't take long before I blurt out a commendation a criticism. As early as the opening credits, I al- ady spot something—font style, music arrange- ent, whatever—to passionately comment on.

Or whenever I finish reading a book, I instantly ribble mini-book reviews in my journal, and make re that I share my sentiments with other book- orms.

Even when it comes to seemingly trivial or mun- ne things like magazine covers or the packaging of *tsirya*, I make sure I can quickly concoct a com- ent.

With all the fashion and award shows and strangers at I have been exposed to, I have realized that when comes to making judgments, especially of people, it highly fulfilling and entertaining when comments e witty, original and delivered in a jiffy.

ILLUSTRATION: ANTHONY MISTADES

I would have to admit that I am quite helpless in the judgment department. Like many people out there, I instantly judge others based on their appearance, uniqueness of clothes, ability to properly use the p and f sounds and the number of zits on their face.

Shoot me for being shallow. At least I have the balls to admit such a flaw.

As another manifestation of my shallowness, let me admit the driving force behind my decision to kill the critic in me: Holy Week.

Of course, I know that change should not take place just because Easter is around or just because s the start of a new year. But when I heard about w all my friends were planning to go to the beach r some flirting, or be vegetables in the house come oly Week, I decided that some changing for the bet- r would be beneficial, no matter what the reason.

And so I started trying not to judge others.

At first, it was easy. All I had to do was stay home focus on work at the office. The less people ound, the more successful I was turning out to be my quest to stop judging others based on shallow, significant or impossible reasons.

heater

On Day 2, I admitted to myself that I was being ich a cheater. As punishment, I dashed to the mall ght after a day's worth of boring work, and went to here the crowds were: the food court!

Expectedly, a throng of varied individuals populat- l the place. Beautiful ones I wanted to meet, ugly ings I managed not to laugh at, normal-looking es I almost totally ignored, gods and goddesses ho made me feel so inferior I wanted to go home.

I was looking at everyone and describing them in y head, when I quickly realized that what I was do- g was a little more than mere describing. I was al- idy judging. Again.

I tried it again for another hour, but just as miser- ly failed. I quickly realized that judging others is mething that is quite natural to a lot of people (or aybe just to me?), something quite difficult to adicate from your system in an instant. Something at would take more than just a mere week, holy or t, to learn to change.

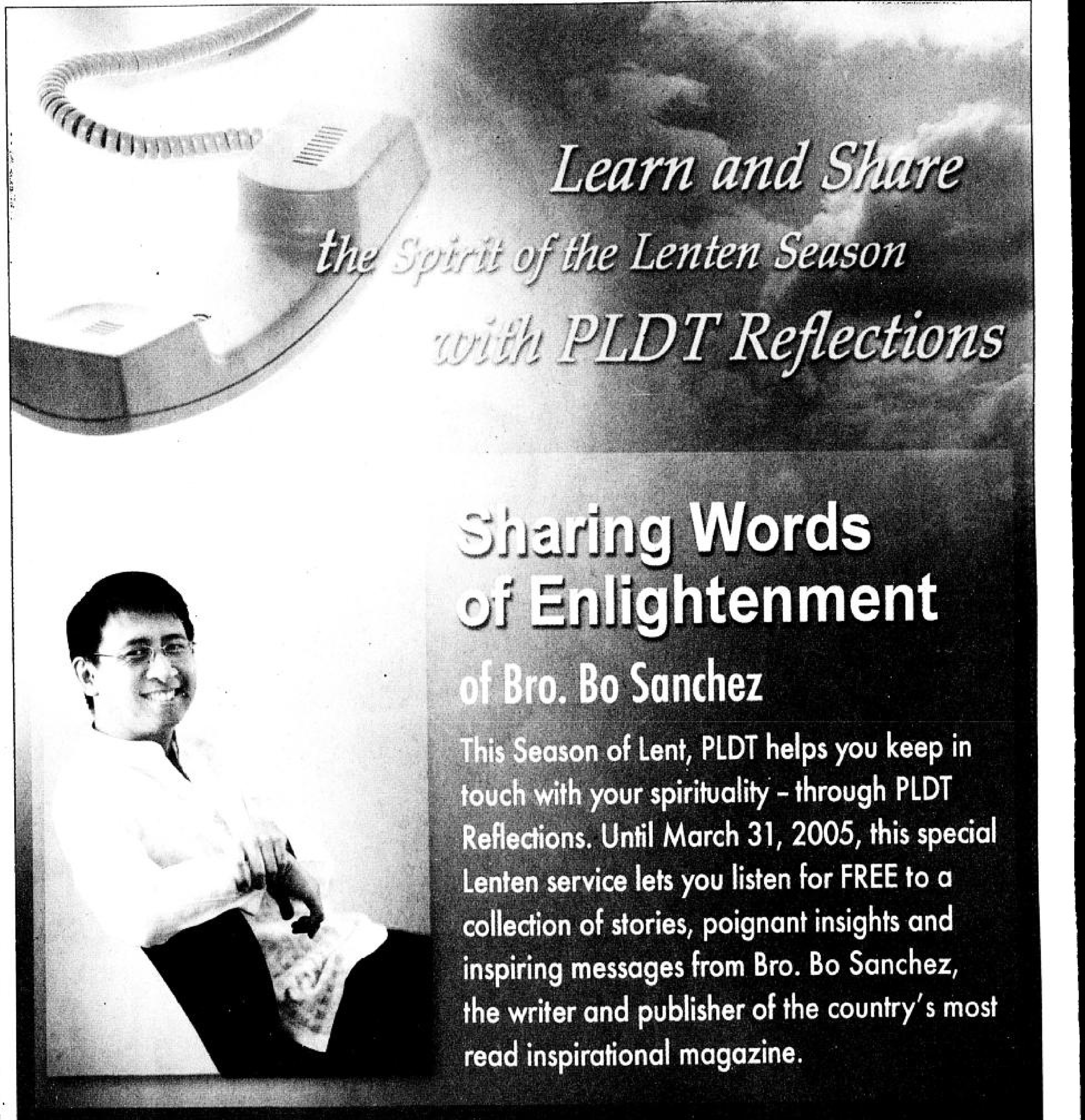
Then and there I decided to give up on my mis- on.

I'm still bent on becoming a less judgmental critic. nd although I'm giving myself the rest of my life to arn how to be less judgmental, I sincerely hope I complish it soon.

In my 24 years of criticizing clothes, hairstyles, oks, behavior, even the way people talk, there is ly one lesson I can think of now: not to let impres- ons or judgments stop me from getting to know meone at a more intimate and special level.

Be very afraid of how your first impressions can nder you from possibly the best relationships in is world.

E-mail the author at marksablan_2bu@yahoo.com



Sharing Words of Enlightenment of Bro. Bo Sanchez

This Season of Lent, PLDT helps you keep in touch with your spirituality - through PLDT Reflections. Until March 31, 2005, this special Lenten service lets you listen for FREE to a collection of stories, poignant insights and inspiring messages from Bro. Bo Sanchez, the writer and publisher of the country's most read inspirational magazine.

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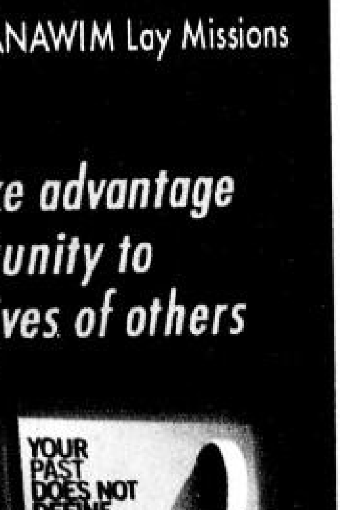

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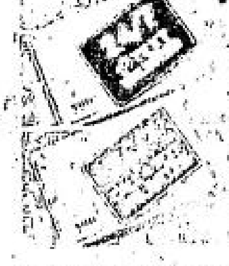

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MICKEY Howley (above left and inset) was surrounded by people at the Recovery Andaman Forum at the Phuket Hilton Arcadia. PAM PASTOR

Mickey Howley gave up his comfortable life in the US to help tsunami victims in Thailand. Can you?

100 days of compassion

By Pam Pastor

WHEN the killer tsunami struck South Asia, Mickey Howley was thousands of miles away, safe and sound in the United States.

But the tragedy had an impact on him. "I heard the death toll climb from 500 to 100,000... I realized that there was going to be a massive amount of help necessary for the recovery efforts there."

Mickey is no stranger to volunteerism. As a long-distance runner, he has participated in motivating those new to the sport achieve their goals. He has volunteered at a hospital doing outpatient release, has participated in hurricane clean-up work and gives blood regularly.

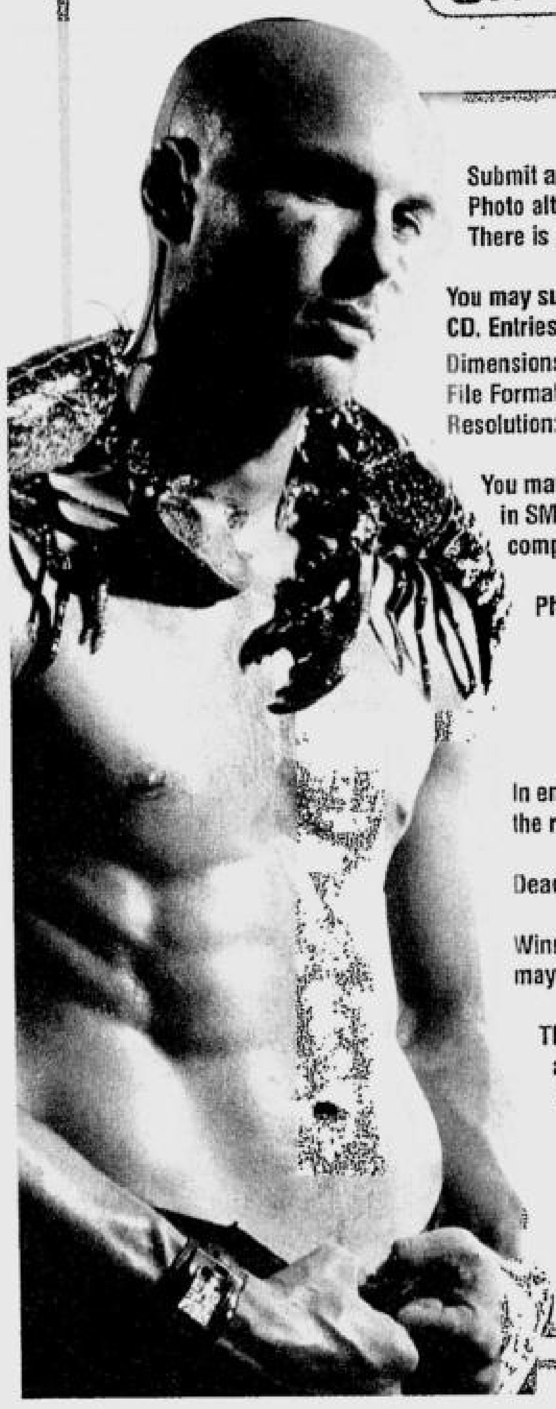
Last December, as he witnessed the horrors unfold on his television screen, his desire to help became stronger and stronger.

"When I began pointing the finger and saying to myself that someone needed to go over to Thailand to help, the finger pointed right back at me. I felt that if someone with my current personal freedom could not give up his life for a while, then who was I expecting to go?"

Because Mickey is self-employed and works as a fine finish carpenter and home remodeler, there was no boss to consult about leaving to give aid.

"I am also currently unmarried and single,

100 DAYS/ E3



TechnoMarine
SHOW YOUR TECHNO

Submit a creative photo of your favorite TechnoMarine watch. Photo alteration/editing or digital enhancement may be applied. There is no limit to the number of entries that you may send.

You may submit either a hard copy or soft copy of your work in a CD. Entries must follow the specifications below:
Dimensions for Hard Copies: 8" x 10" photo or A4 size print-out
File Format: TIFF or JPEG
Resolution: Minimum of 300dpi

You may send your entries at the TechnoMarine stores located in SM Megamall and Greenbelt 3. Make sure to indicate your complete address and contact details.

Photos will be judged based on the following criteria:
Creativity 50%
Composition 30%
Overall Impact 20%
TOTAL 100%

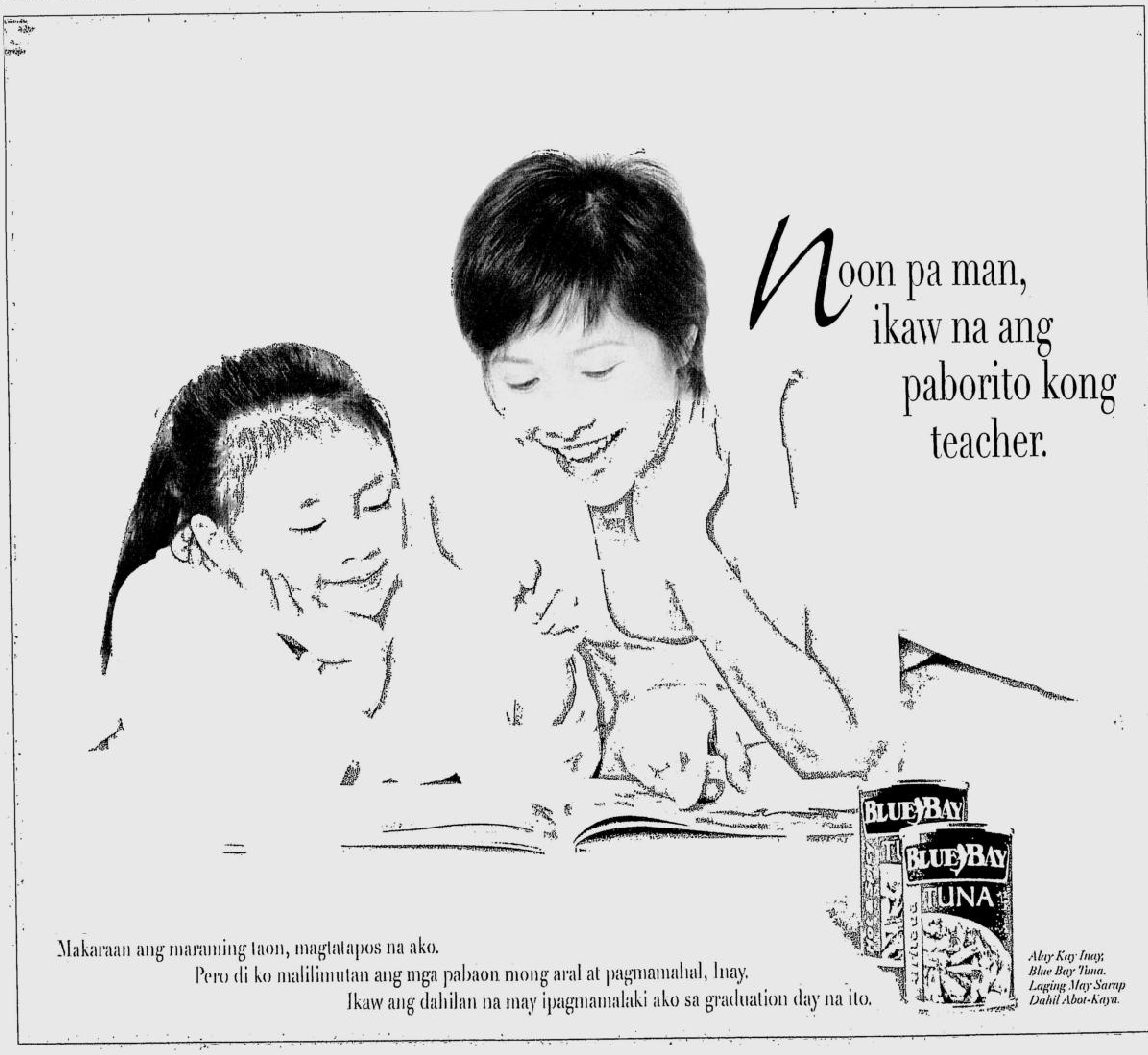
In entering the contest, the photographer agrees to surrender the rights to his entry for TechnoMarine usage.

Deadline for submission is on April 30, 2005.

Winners will each receive a TechnoMarine watch. A winner may only win once. Winners will be notified through mail.

The results may not be contested after it has been publicly announced. The top 3 entries will be announced on the week of May 19-30, 2005 on MTV Philippines.

TechnoMarine



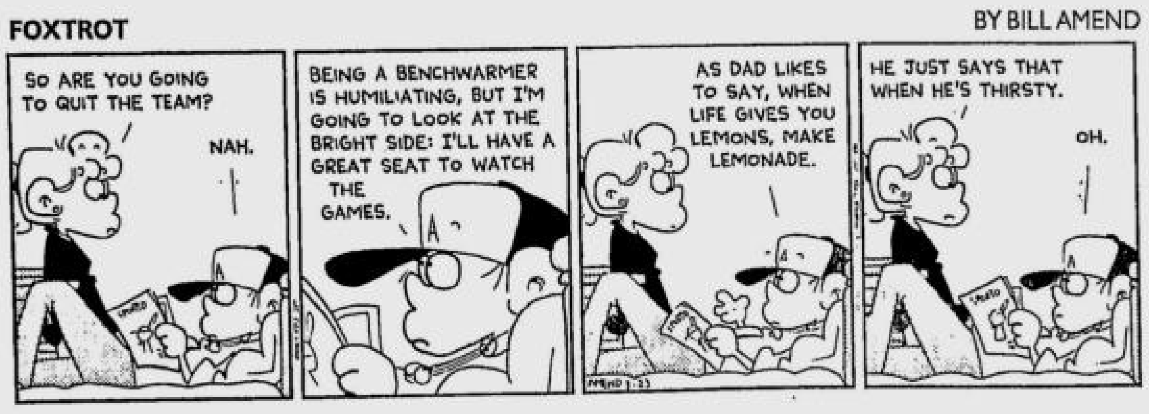
Noon pa man, ikaw na ang paborito kong teacher.

Makaraan ang maraming taon, magtatapos na ako.
Pero di ko malilimutan ang mga pabaon mong aral at pagmamahal, Inay.
Ikaw ang dahilan na may ipagmamalaki ako sa graduation day na ito.

Alay Kay Inay,
Blue Bay Tuna.
Laging May Sarap
Dahil Abot-Kaya.

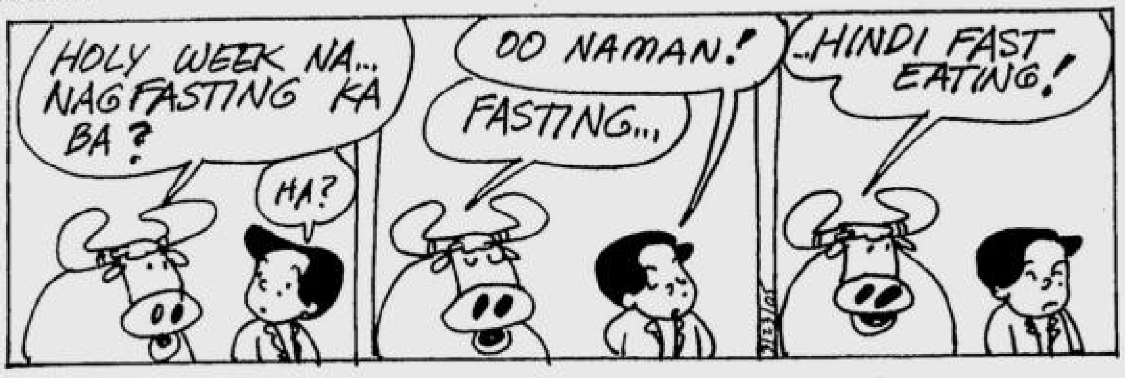
FOXTROT

BY BILL AMEND


SO ARE YOU GOING TO QUIT THE TEAM?
NAH.
BEING A BENCHWARMER IS HUMILIATING, BUT I'M GOING TO LOOK AT THE BRIGHT SIDE: I'LL HAVE A GREAT SEAT TO WATCH THE GAMES.
AS DAD LIKES TO SAY, WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS, MAKE LEMONADE.
HE JUST SAYS THAT WHEN HE'S THIRSTY.
OH.

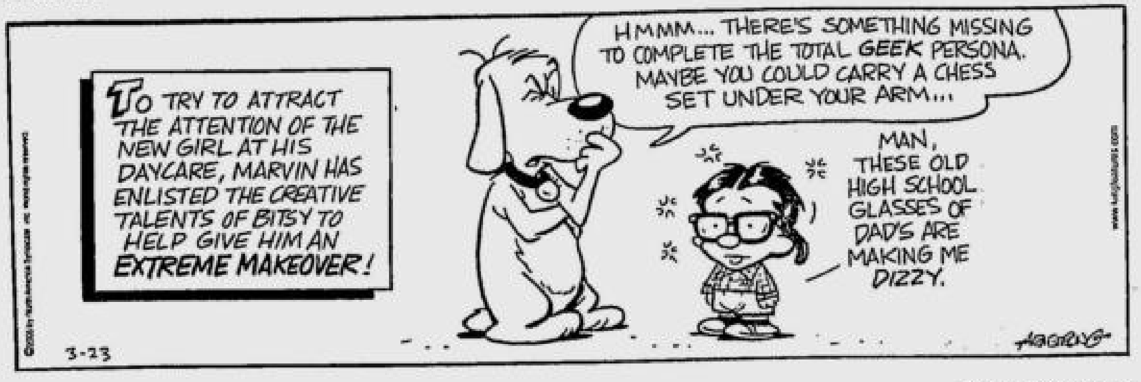
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


HOLY WEEK NA... NAGFASTING KA BA?
HA?
OO NAMAN!
FASTING...
..HINDI FAST EATING!

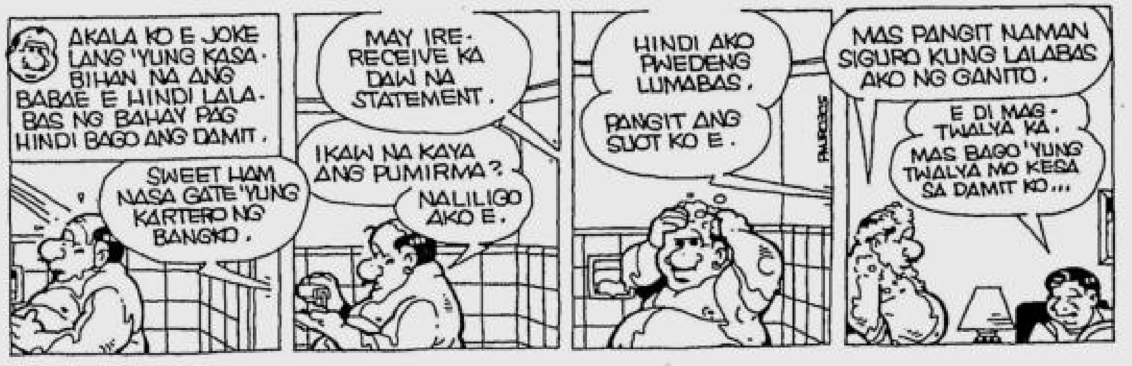
MARVIN

BY TOM ARMSTRONG


TO TRY TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE NEW GIRL AT HIS DAYCARE, MARVIN HAS ENLISTED THE CREATIVE TALENTS OF BITSY TO HELP GIVE HIM AN EXTREME MAKEOVER!
HMMM... THERE'S SOMETHING MISSING TO COMPLETE THE TOTAL GEEK PERSONA. MAYBE YOU COULD CARRY A CHESS SET UNDER YOUR ARM...
MAN, THESE OLD HIGH SCHOOL GLASSES OF DAD'S ARE MAKING ME DIZZY.
3-23

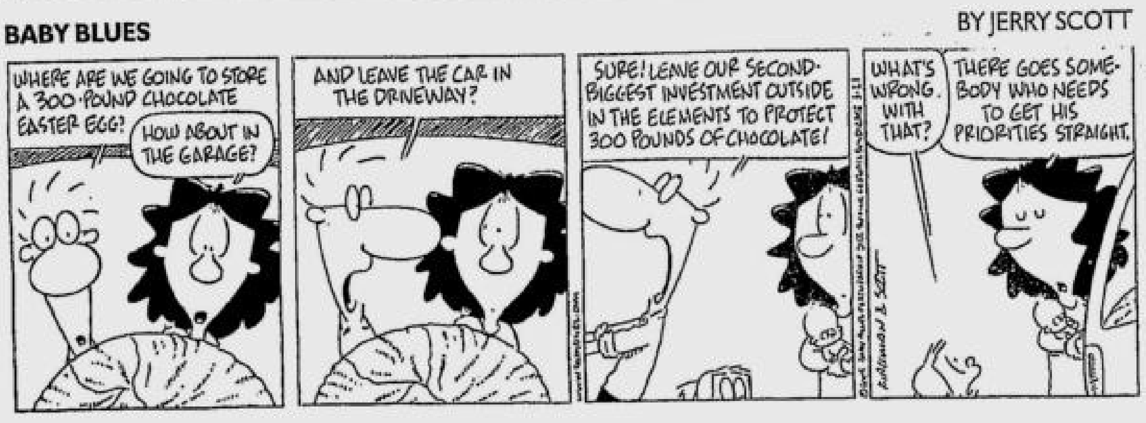
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


AKALA KO E JOKE LANG 'YUNG KASABIHAN NA ANG BABAE E HINDI LALABAS NG BAHAY PAG HINDI BAGO ANG DAMIT.
SWEET HAM NASA GATE 'YUNG KARTERO NG BANGKO.
MAY IRE-RECEIVE KA DAW NA STATEMENT.
IKAW NA KAYA ANG PUMIRMA?
NALILIGO AKO E.
HINDI AKO PWEDENG LUMABAS.
PANGIT ANG SUOT KO E.
MAS PANGIT NAMAN SIGURO KUNG LALABAS AKO NG GANITO.
E DI MAG-TWALYA KA. MAS BAGO 'YUNG TWALYA MO KESA SA DAMIT KO...

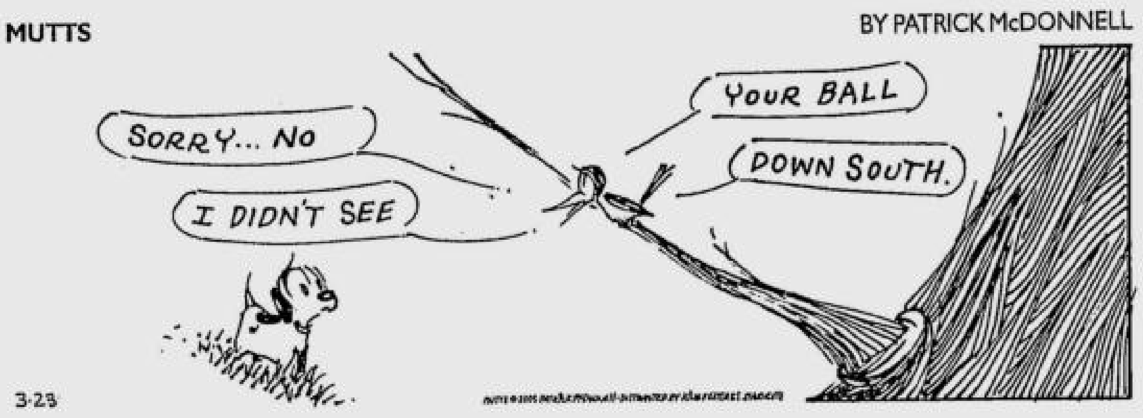
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


WHERE ARE WE GOING TO STORE A 300-POUND CHOCOLATE EASTER EGG?
HOW ABOUT IN THE GARAGE?
AND LEAVE THE CAR IN THE DRIVEWAY?
SURE! LEAVE OUR SECOND-BIGGEST INVESTMENT OUTSIDE IN THE ELEMENTS TO PROTECT 300 POUNDS OF CHOCOLATE!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?
THERE GOES SOMEBODY WHO NEEDS TO GET HIS PRIORITIES STRAIGHT.

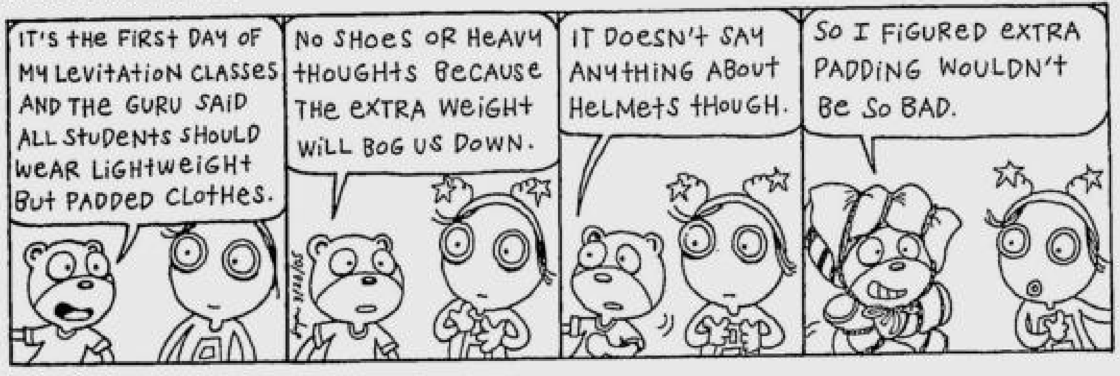
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


SORRY... NO
I DIDN'T SEE
YOUR BALL
DOWN SOUTH.
3-23

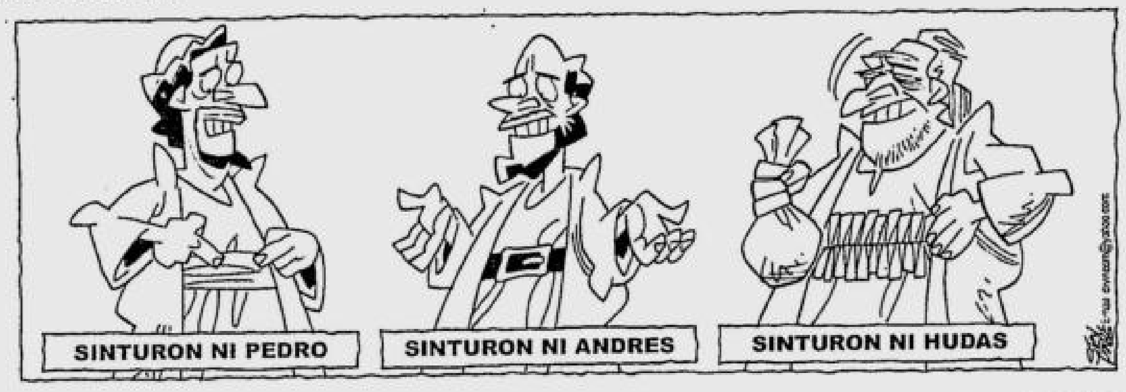
ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


IT'S THE FIRST DAY OF MY LEVITATION CLASSES AND THE GURU SAID ALL STUDENTS SHOULD WEAR LIGHTWEIGHT BUT PADDED CLOTHES.
NO SHOES OR HEAVY THOUGHTS BECAUSE THE EXTRA WEIGHT WILL BOG US DOWN.
IT DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT HELMETS THOUGH.
SO I FIGURED EXTRA PADDING WOULDN'T BE SO BAD.

DIVINE COMEDY

BY STEVEN PABALINAS


SINTURON NI PEDRO
SINTURON NI ANDRES
SINTURON NI HUDAS

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: You have a wide range of talents and interests. You often pursue many avenues at once. You're concerned with the big questions in life. You never accept things on face value; you test everything. You're a risk-taker; in fact, you're courageous. You have a special love for children. The year ahead favors all social activities and marriage. Birthdate of: Keri Russell, actress; Roger Bannister, runner; Akira Kurosawa, movie director.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Interruptions at work are likely today. They could be related to computer systems crashing, technology, electronics or unexpected groups of people. Just go with the flow.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): An unexpected flirtation could cause your heart to flutter today. The source of this flirtation might shock you. Who would have thought? Parents should be vigilant about children and minor accidents.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Small appliances might break down at home today—just minor things. Nevertheless, your routine will be interrupted. Be patient with family members who explode.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): You're full of bright, even brilliant ideas today. That's because you're thinking out of the box. Take extra precautions when driving and walking. It's easy to become distracted today.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): You're the last of the big-time spenders. (And you know it!) Today is one of those days when you can't resist impulse buying. (Just to be safe, keep your receipts.)

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): Conversations with others are quite unpredictable today. That's because the Moon in your sign opposes wild, wacky Uranus. It makes you especially rebellious.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Surprising news from the government, hospitals, prisons or large institutions might catch you off-guard today. Fortunately, it's nothing you can't handle. Remain calm.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): A friend might surprise you today with some shocking news. Possibly, you will meet a real character. Be prepared for something different and interesting.

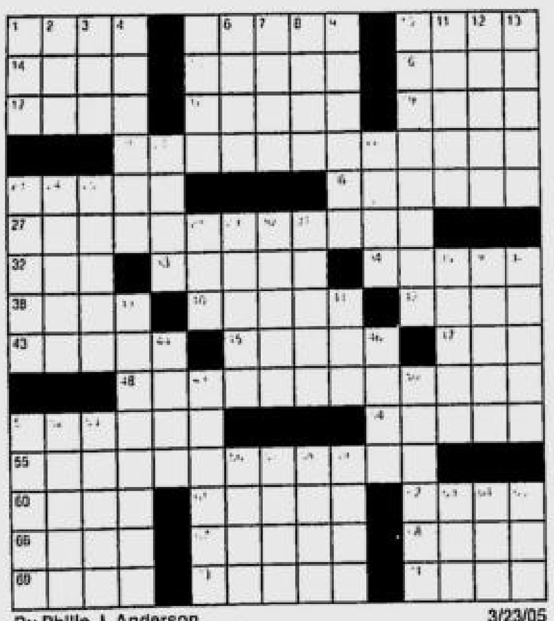
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Your boss (or your parent) might say something that surprises you. Perhaps new technology will be introduced where you work. Alternatively, computer systems could crash; power outages might create delays.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): You're surprised to hear what somebody else thinks (religiously or politically) today. You had no idea this was how this person saw things.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): Today the Moon is in Virgo, but it opposes your own ruler, Uranus. This could create some financial surprises for you. Guard against loss. However, some of you will find money.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Dealings with others are completely unpredictable today. People are touchy! Knowing this, you'll have to be extra diplomatic and charming. Forewarned is forearmed.

DAILY CROSSWORD



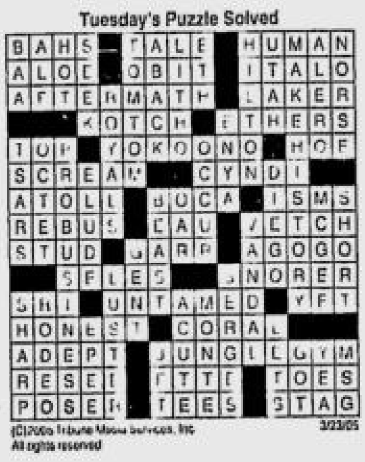
By Philip J. Anderson
Portland, OR

3/23/05

ACROSS
1 Boxer Willard
5 Spanish hero
10 Some old Fords
14 Homely citrus?
15 __ Alegre, Brazil
16 Monopoly token
17 Thug
18 More chilly
19 Anna Sten title role
20 Tiring to the max
23 Ryan of "Love Story"
26 Mazda models
27 Enigmatic to the max
32 Compass pt.
33 Extra
34 Test the will
38 DEA worker
40 Buddhist shrine
42 Missile housing
43 Schnoz
45 Arm of the White Sea
47 Bobbsey twin
48 Agonizing to the max
51 Simple sweepers
54 Tosses out
55 Noisy to the max
60 Med. school subj.
61 Misprint
62 __ for business
66 Nerve network
67 Wax theatrical
68 Infamous Roman tyrant
69 Legal title
70 Window parts
71 Biting insect

DOWN
1 Moonshine container
2 Big-headedness
3 __-mo
4 One-name comic
5 Saga on a grand scale
6 Security device
7 Baby bed
8 Cato's way
9 Scale notes
10 Connections
11 Characteristic
12 Reed or Fargo
13 Hosiery mishaps
21 Clerical vestments
22 Isn't incorrect?
23 Portents
24 Hebrew month
25 January in Oaxaca
28 Saturn's wife
29 Croc's cousin
30 Struggler's sound
31 Pariah
35 Smaller versions
36 Factory
37 Barbecue tool
39 Emceed jointly
41 Bring to maturity
44 Fill-in worker
46 Pretty soon
49 In dreamland
50 Manatee's cousin
51 Facial growth
52 Indian princess
53 Sermonize
56 Cookbook author Rombauer
57 Disney sci-fi movie
58 Lug along
59 Angers
63 Corral
64 Memorable period
65 "To be or __ to be.."

Tuesday's Puzzle Solved



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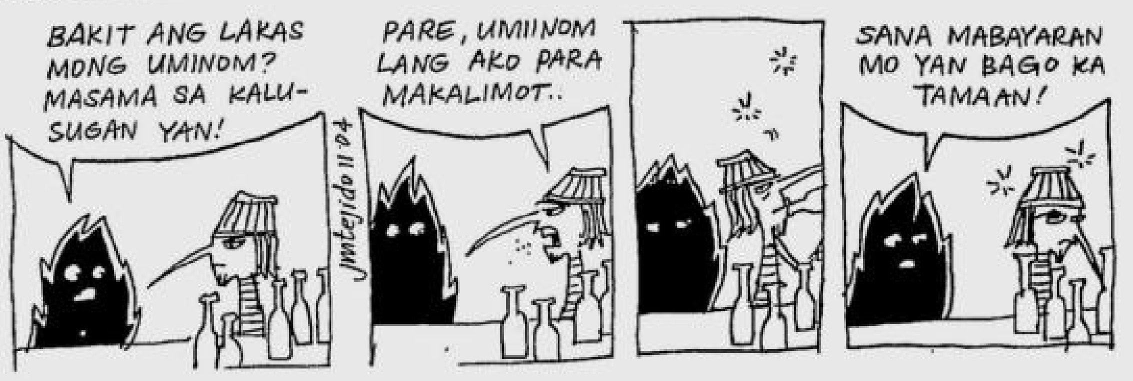
3/23/05

GASFAR
fuel saving tips
CHECK THE CARBURETOR
Check the carburetor for any clogs and take it to the shop every 15,000 km. for a proper overhaul.

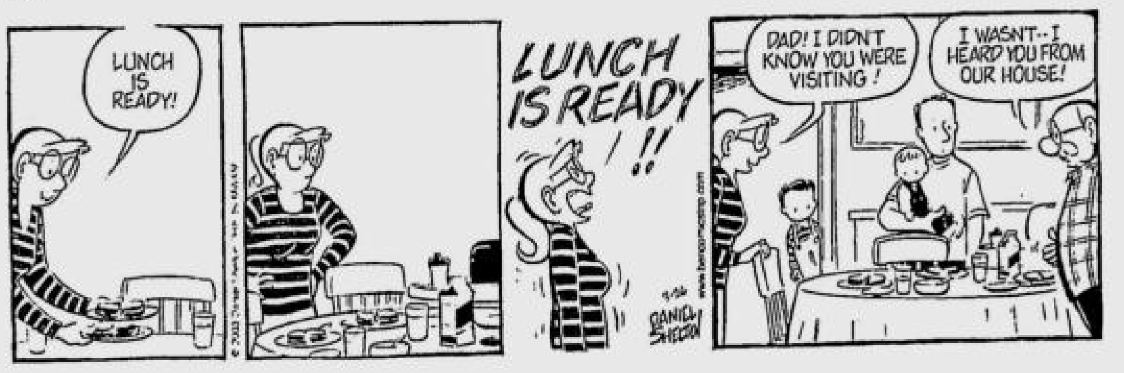
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


BAKIT ANG LAKAS MONG UMINOM? MASAMA SA KALUSUGAN YAN!
PARE, UMIINOM LANG AKO PARA MAKALIMOT..
SANA MABAYARAN MO YAN BAGO KA TAMAAN!
jmtejido 11'04

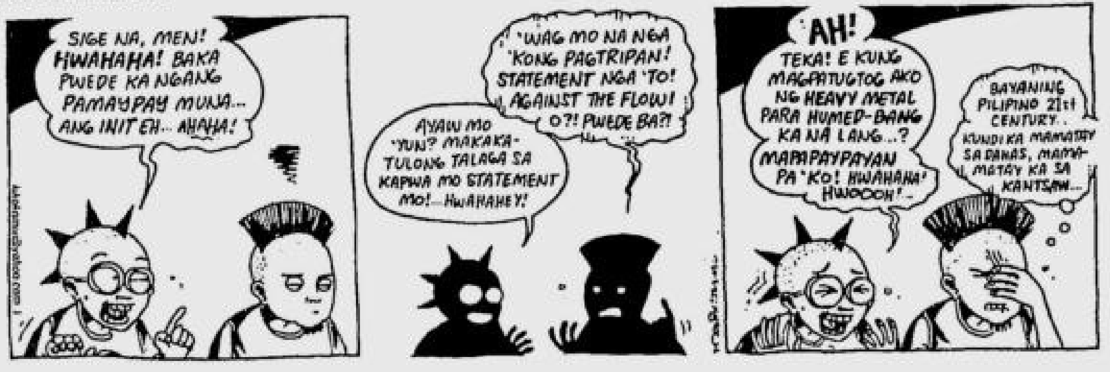
BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


LUNCH IS READY!
LUNCH IS READY!!!
DAD! I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE VISITING!
I WASN'T--I HEARD YOU FROM OUR HOUSE!

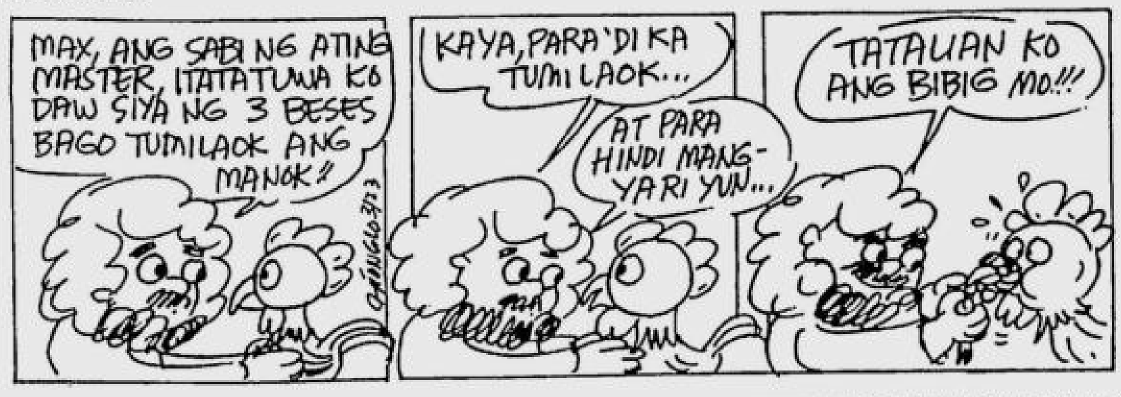
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


SIGE NA, MEN! HWAHAHA! BAKA PWEDE KA NGANG PAMAYPAY MUNA... ANG INIT EH... AHAHA!
AYAW MO 'YUN? MAKAKA-TULONG TALAGA SA KAPWA MO STATEMENT MO!...HWAHAHEY!
'WAG MO NA NGA 'KONG PAGTRIPAN! STATEMENT NGA 'TO! AGAINST THE FLOW! O?! PWEDE BA?!
AH!
TEKA! E KUNG MAGPATUGTOG AKO NG HEAVY METAL PARA HUMED-BANG KA NA LANG...? MAPAPAYPAYAN PA 'KO! HWAHAHA! HWOOOH!
BAYANING PILIPINO 21st CENTURY.. KUNDI KA MAMATAY SA DAHAS, MAMAMATAY KA SA KANTSAW...

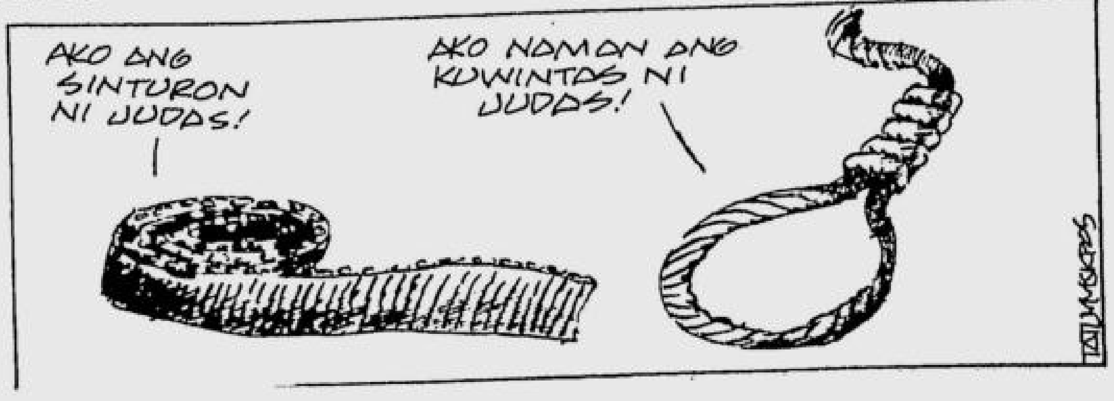
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


MAX, ANG SABI NG ATING MASTER, ITATATUWA KO DAW SIYA NG 3 BESES BAGO TUMILAOK ANG MANOK!!
KAYA, PARA 'DI KA TUMILAOK...
AT PARA HINDI MANGYARI YUN...
TATALIAN KO ANG BIBIG MO!!!

TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


AKO ANG SINTURON NI JUDAS!
AKO NAMAN ANG KUWINTAS NI JUDAS!

100 days of compassion

From page E1

enabling me to leave without affecting a significant other in an emotional way," he says.

From London to Thailand

Although he had saved up for a trip to London for 18 months, he decided to change his travel plans and go to Thailand instead, not minding that the fare would double.

After following his doctor's orders of waiting for his immunization shots to take a significant effect, Mickey left for Thailand. But not without saying goodbye to his beloved dog, Ben. Mickey still carries a photo of Ben wherever he goes.

He traveled to Thailand in the hopes of doing the jobs nobody else wanted to.

"Arriving one month after the great wave struck, I figured that those relief workers who were here from the start may be experiencing some degree of burnout, and my aim was to help in any way I could. I was prepared to give my all."

Mickey was ready for anything. In fact, he left a will before leaving Washington State, just in case something happened.

It was Mickey's first time in Thailand. "All that I had heard on the media was Phuket, Phuket, Phuket. After a couple of days of acclimation in Bangkok, I took an overnight train and then a bus to get there."

But when he arrived, things weren't what he expected. "I was, quite honestly, underwhelmed at the lack of damage compared to what I had seen and heard through the media. The wave that had hit Phuket was about 4 meters high."

He decided to ask people where the hardest-hit area was. "I received the same answer from each one—Khao Lak."

Devastation

The very next day, he rode a bus to Khao Lak. "That's where I saw the devastation. The wave that hit Khao Lak was 11 meters high and traveled 4 kilometers inland in places. The destruction was unlike that which I had ever seen."

Soon after his arrival, Mickey started working with the Tsunami Volunteer Center and hasn't stopped since. He took the plunge into life in Khao Lak.

"Every moment of every day has been an unforgettable story. A year's worth of television miniseries' day and night would not even begin to scratch the surface. 80 percent of families lost a family member. Many lost all that they owned. Currently, 6,000 men, women and children live in temporary camps in the area—all who lived in homes before the tragedy. The tremendous economic loss, which has had serious ripple effects, has added to the grief and human loss suffered here," he says.

Mickey has witnessed the Thais' quick rise from the tragedy. "I must say that in the five or six weeks that I have been here, each day I have seen another business reopen, more people in the shops and restaurants, and more traffic on the roads. The first week I was in Khao Lak, I sat in a restaurant for two hours one evening and was the only customer. In the same restaurant three weeks later, I counted 34 customers as I sat and ate. It made me feel like Khao Lak was indeed renewing itself. The area and its people are moving forward every day."

Loss and grief

Loss is not a new thing for Mickey, whose life changed after the September 11 attacks in New York. A native of New York, having grown up on Long Island for 17 years, he was at another place when the attack occurred, but witnessed the towers fall on live television. The event affected him deeply.

During that time, he was running a successful business, had four employees under him and was remodeling a 110-year-old property that he bought in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

But he lost all that. "All of that slipped away from me as I slipped into a deep low caused by the 9/11 tragedy. I stayed in that trough for over two years, giving up friends and basically my entire life to grief."

It is his own sense of loss that gives him the strength to continue helping people in Thailand. "Having been well familiar with loss gave me the empathy, I believe, needed to treat my limited time here as extremely important."

Originally, Mickey had intended to stay for a month. But last Feb. 22, his return ticket expired, becoming just another piece of paper, no thanks to a no-changes policy implemented by the website that sold him his ticket.

"Currently I have no flight back to the States, but I am hoping that will take care of itself when the time comes for me to leave this beautiful country."

He is currently working on the 100 Days Tsunami Memorial, a festival that draws its roots from the Thai belief that on the 100th day after death, the grieving for lost souls is to cease, because that's when the soul is liberated from its former life to pass onto the next.

Mickey's role has been to coordinate the event through the necessary governmental processes and media sources in their aim to inform those affected that there's an opportunity to gather in an international community and to share in the moving forward of all those lives affected.

Other volunteers are currently involved in artist and performer coordination, International Tsunami Village construction and workshops coordination. The three-day weekend which starts April 4 and ends April 6 will feature events revolving around the Hope, Spirit and Renewal theme. There will be art, music and dance performers, along with survivor's expressions of spirit.

How to help

At the recent Recovery Andaman Forum, Mickey stood up and told an audience of 800 journalists and travel agents from all over the world about the project. When the forum was over, people crowded around him, asking for more information and offering help.

And there are many ways by which people could help. The Tsunami Volunteers website (www.tsunamivolunteer.net) has a lot of information for those wishing to volunteer.

Right now, there are over 120 volunteers from all over the world at The Tsunami Volunteer Center in Khao Lak. Since late December, over 600 individuals have arrived from all parts of the globe to help. Many of these people were people who were turned away by larger relief organizations because what they can contribute is "unskilled assistance." These people found a place in Khao Lak and the Volunteer Center.

These volunteers pay for their own accommodations and food costs while the Center operates on private donations in their aim to accomplish their goals.

According to Mickey, everyone is welcome to help.

"We will not refuse an individual interested in helping and who is willing to give himself to these efforts. There is no wrong way to share goodwill—and goodwill is priceless."

E-mail the author at ppastor@inquirer.com.ph.

'If you want to help, visit my country'

WHEN tragedy hits a tourism-dependent region, causing arrival numbers to drop, tour guides feel the impact.

Orathai "Klang" Aryupong, a tour guide who was born and raised in Phuket, experienced that during last year's tsunami. But instead of wallowing, Klang decided to make herself useful and took a head-first plunge into the rescue efforts.

She was on Patong Beach on the day of the disaster. "I saw low tide and I asked people to run away. Big waves came three times and the last one was terrible," she said.

That very same day, she jumped into action. "I decided to bring water to the Phuket Provincial Hall because I heard some victims from Phi Phi Island didn't have water to drink. Then I went to Vachira Hospital to help some victims and their relatives."

Soon, Klang realized her ability to speak English would benefit a lot of people. The next day, she went to Khao Lak, the hardest-hit area, and helped in the search for bodies, which was emotional for her.

In the middle of January, she started working with the British Embassy and the Phuket Provincial Hall as their link for information. She helped victims who had lost all their money and their passports in the tragedy.

Tourists weren't the only ones affected. A lot of Klang's friends had lost their jobs as a result of the tragedy. Tourists canceled planned trips to the affected areas of Thailand, lowering the demand for tour guides.

Although tourists have started to trickle in again, a lot of the tour guides are helping with the renovation and restoration efforts in the affected areas.

Many of them, including Klang, also worked with the Tourism Authority of Thailand during the recent Recovery Andaman Mega Fam Tour which brought in 800 journalists and travel agents from all over the world..

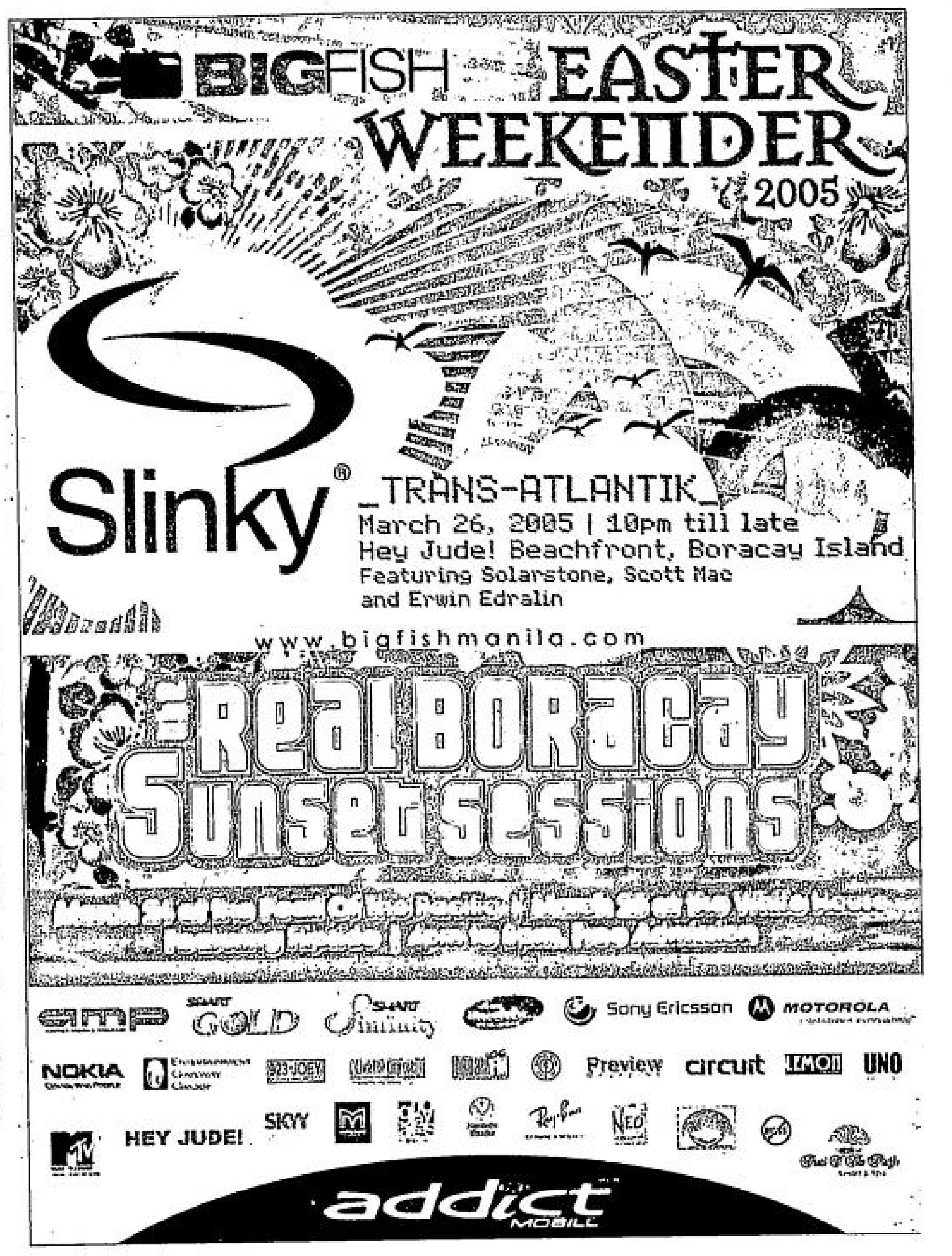
Klang was assigned to the Philippine contingent and spent four days with us.

She has one thing to say to people who think Thailand has forgotten too quickly and that it is recovering too fast: "It's useless to keep remembering. Keep in mind that there's no need to talk all the time. If we just talk all the time, we cannot stay alive."

Klang has a lot of love for her country. It is evident in everything she says and does. She stresses that if people want to help her country, all they have to do is visit.

"Visit Phuket, Krabi, Chiangmai, Bangkok and Pattaya. Eat green curry, tom yam, pad thai, seafood and papaya salad. Shop, visit the Grand Palace in Bangkok, learn Thai culture and drink," she says.

Yes, Thailand is on its way to recovery. And the future seems even brighter for the Land of Smiles, thanks to locals like Klang. *Pam Pastor*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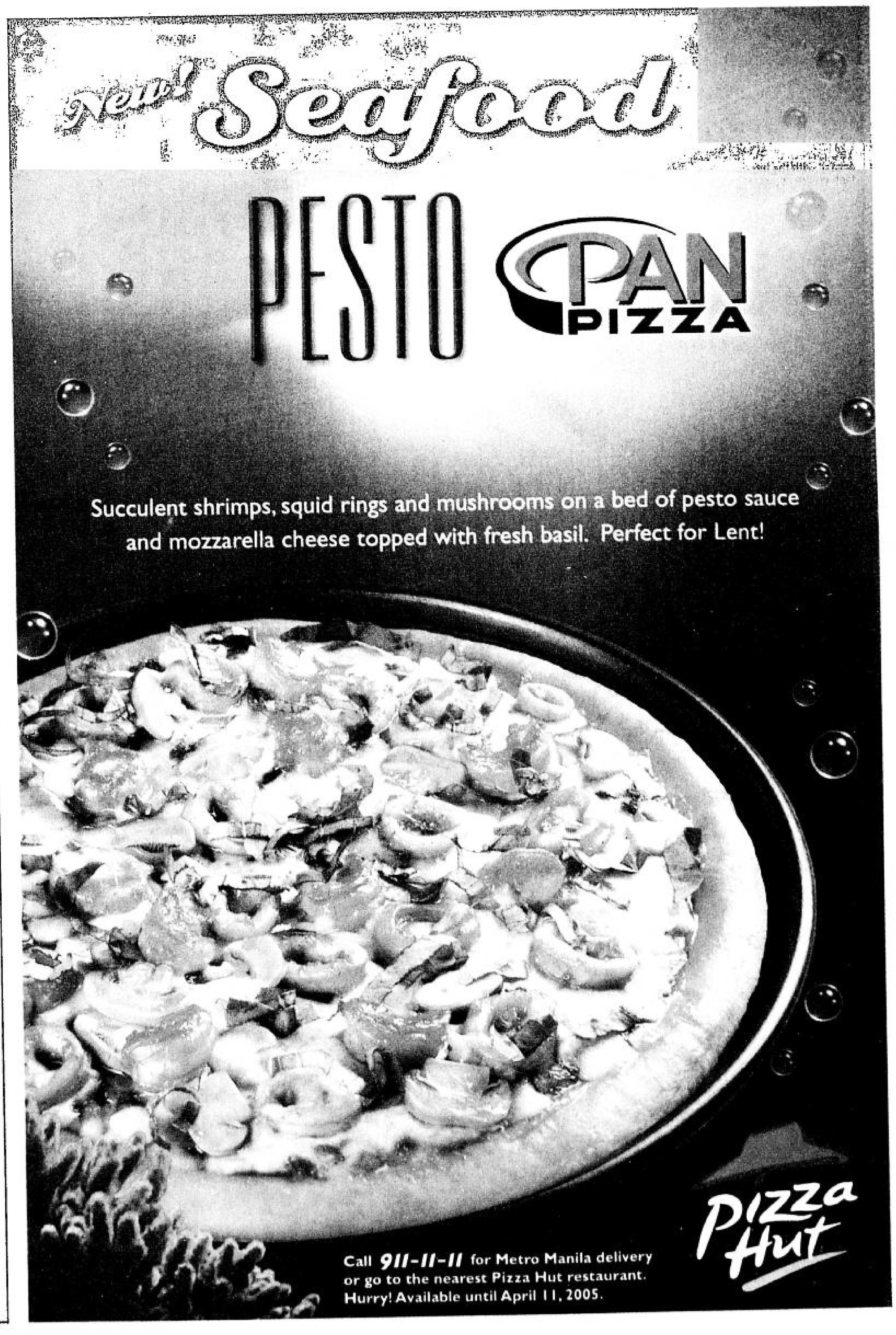

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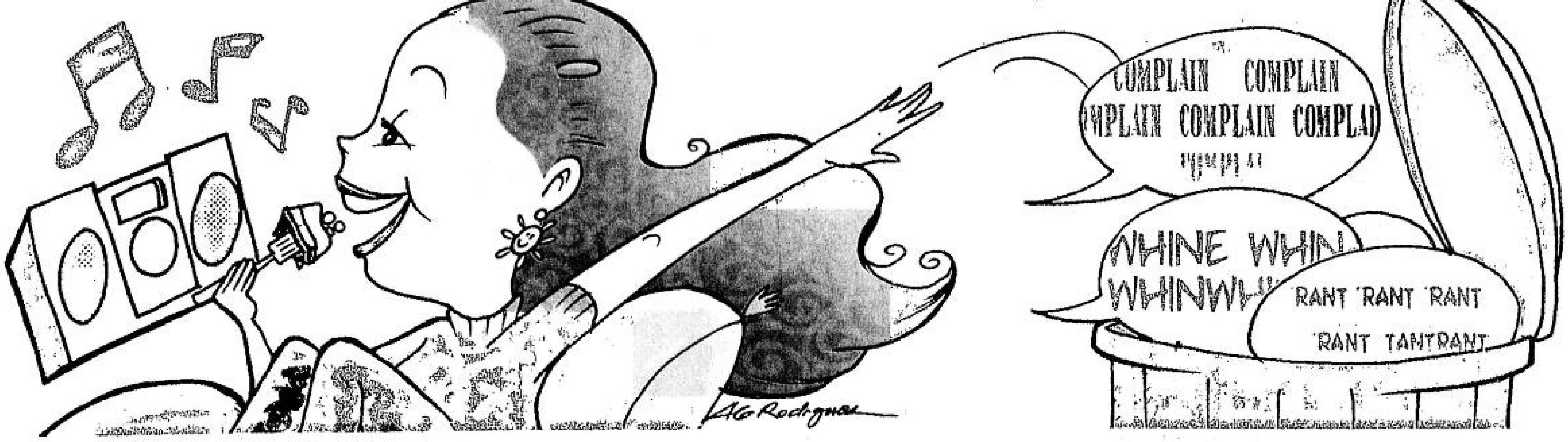


ILLUSTRATION: ALBERT RODRIGUEZ

Whine no more, my sweet

I hated people who found something to complain about every other minute. Ironically, I did it, too

By Marla Miniano
2bU! Correspondent

ON ANY other week, a No Complaining lifestyle would have been possible. Torture—since complaining is my ultimate form of stress release—but fairly possible.

But the No Complaining rule did not barge in on any regular week. No, it just had to be on my finals week.

I've always wanted to lessen the number of complaints I spew out each day. I hated people who found something to whine about every other minute, but ironically, I did it, too.

No more money? Whine. Inedible food in the fridge? Whine. Bad quiz results? Whine. Too many deadlines? Whine.

Yes, my ranting was getting a bit too annoying to handle, even for me. It was time to take action, to venture into the unknown. It was time to impose an Anti-Whining Campaign on myself. During finals week.

The first day started out fine. I knew how to explain the thesis statements for my Philosophy orals, except for thesis #6. I was pretty confident; I understood nine out of the 10 thesis statements, and I didn't really want to force myself to take in any more information.

Besides, I thought, what are the chances that I would end up getting #6? After a few hours, I entered the consultation room, took a seat, and picked a card. It was thesis #6. Fate was trying to be funny. I forgot to laugh.

When I got back to my dorm, I was met with concerned queries about my orals. Well, out of the 10 thesis statements, I got the only one I didn't understand, I replied. I then mustered a smile and rushed to add, "But it's okay." I think I managed to salvage it one way or another.

As if trying to shut up wasn't hard enough, I had to avoid running over the disaster in my head as well, for fear that I would suddenly blurt out a barrage of complaints.

And so, I grabbed the only option left at the moment: I gobbled up a huge chunk of cheesecake, buried my head in my pillow and slept.

Less agony

Fortunately, the next few days brought in less agony. I had a final written exam that left me feeling like I was just hit by a garbage truck, and a disastrous group oral exam, but at least there were no more cruel "coincidences."

There was a lot of lip-biting involved, but I was able to prevent my mouth from opening whenever anything that resembled a complaint would try to escape.

Somehow, I got through the whole stretch of finals week without griping or grumbling. I noticed how my conversations with my friends seemed happier and less depressing. I noticed how I began to smile more and laugh more and be more forgiving of my own mistakes.

I noticed how it felt so much better to move on after an unpleasant episode instead of dwelling on it for eons.

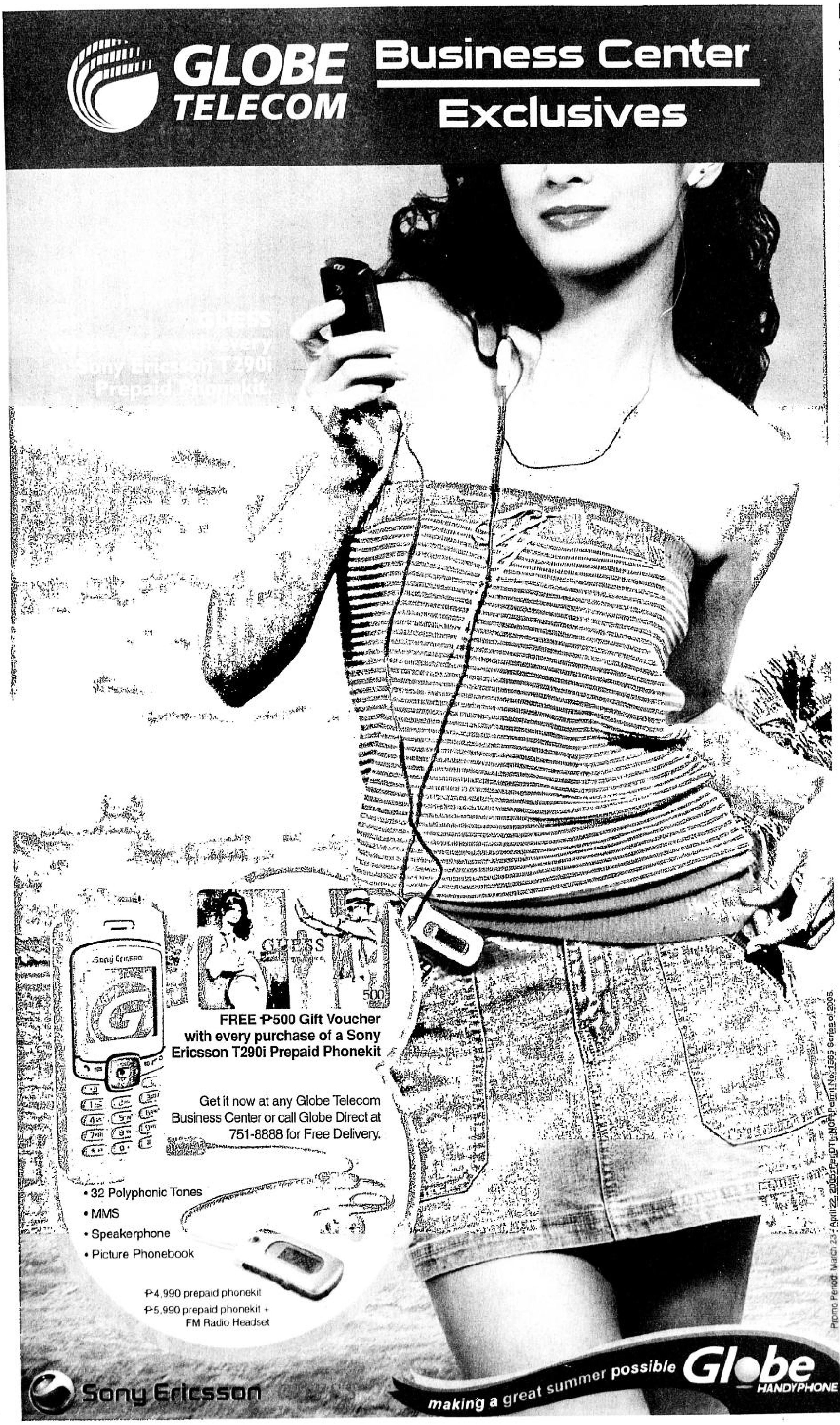
I found other ways to relieve my stress. I listened to Sixpence None the Richer (their songs have an amazingly soothing effect on me). I calmed myself by writing in my journal. I imagined all the worse situations I could have been in.

And yes, I constantly tried thinking happy thoughts. I was surprised that I could actually get rid of something that had almost become an automatic response for me. Complaining might have been an effective coping mechanism, but it was really time for me to adapt a more positive one.

There will still be times when I will feel like complaining. And there will still be times when I will give in. But, those times will no longer be a dominant part of me.

After all, I was able to follow the No Complaining rule during my finals week. The other weeks for the rest of the year should be a breeze.

E-mail the author at muyacaramella@yahoo.com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